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JUNE 2012

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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

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GERMANY...Bayern Munich players lie distraught on the turf of their Allianz Arena home after losing the Champions League Final on penalties to Chelsea

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CHILE...Riot police protect Boca Juniors players after their Libertadores Cup win against Union Espanola

SPAIN...Jose Mourinho joins his players to celebrate Real Madrid's La Liga title

RUSSIA...police are crushed as Zenit fans invade the pitch to celebrate their title success at home to Dynamo Moscow

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HOLLAND...Bulgaria's Veselin Minev (left) competes with Dirk Kuyt of Holland in a pre-Euro 2012 friendly in Amsterdam

BRAZIL...(from left) Neymar, Ganso and Arouca celebrate a Santos goal against Sao Paulo

ALGERIA...security guards keep watch during the Algerian Cup Final between CR Belouizdad and ES Setif in Algiers

PICTURES OF THE MONTH QR CODE

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FROM THE EDITOR

There's an awful lot to pack in this month. Chelsea's extraordinary victory over Bayern in Munich takes centre stage, but we also round up the leading leagues from across Europe and publish the official Euro 2012 squads.

While Chelsea's Champions League triumph may not have heartened the game's romantics, it demonstrated the sheer unpredictability of our sport. And for those looking for signs that money does not dominate every nook and cranny of the game, the tale from France of Montpellier's league triumph surely offers adequate compensation. Unfortunately for Montpellier, there's a danger that many of the players listed in the feature (page 66) will have moved on by next season. But their story is still worth recording.

Next month, we review the European Championship in full with our team of reporters in Poland and Ukraine.

In the meantime, the iPad edition of our Euro 2012 special issue is still available to download from Apple Newsstand. For subscribers, the digital edition is free; all you have to do is download the free app. You can get step-by-step instructions at worldsoccer.com.

While Chelsea's triumph may not have heartened the game's romantics, it demonstrated the unpredictability of our sport

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

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2. Falcao stars as Atletico Madrid win the Europa League ..... Page 85
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Mug shots...pictures are presented of those arrested in the "Last Bet" enquiry

ITALY

Scandal threatens Euro 2012 preparations

Just two weeks before the start of Euro 2012, Italian football was yet again rocked by match fixing in the shape of the "Last Bet" enquiry, which first broke exactly one year ago. First casualty this time around was the Zenit left-back Domenico Criscito, who was dropped from the Italy squad because of his involvement in an alleged fixing of a Lazio v Genoa game.

This latest scandal literally arrived right on the doorstep of the current national team when five policemen turned up at the squad's Euro 2012 training camp in Coverciano, Florence at 6.25am to issue an *avviso di garanzia* (judicial notification) to Criscito. Under investigation on charges of "sports fraud" while a Genoa player two seasons ago, Criscito is accused of having met with two Genoa "Ultra" fans and a Bosnian petty criminal just days before the suspect Lazio v Genoa game, which was staged in May 2011.

Needless to say, he pronounced himself totally innocent, saying: "That was just a dinner with Genoa fans after we had lost the derby. I cannot possibly know who exactly are all the people I meet, all the people who want to take pics alongside me or get my autograph".

As with the Calciopoli scandal in 2006, this

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"It's the choice of the prince. If Sepp Blatter [right] wants goal-line technology, the tests will work out. If he didn't want it, they would prove inconclusive"

UEFA president Michel Platini continues to rail against any sort of technological decision-making in the game

"Last Bet" investigation is travelling on two parallel tracks: the relatively quick one of the football federation's disciplinary section, and the slower Cremona-based, state judiciary. Before the summer is over, the football federation hopes to have concluded two match-fixing hearings, involving Serie A, B and C games.

As for the judicial enquiry, it has already led to the imprisonment of 19 people, including Lazio captain Stefano Mauri. Most sensationally of all, however, it also involves current Juventus coach Antonio Conte, who is accused not of involvement in a betting scam but in a piece of "political" match fixing last season when he coached Siena to a Serie A promotion. Conte, whose computer and IPhone were sequestered by investigators, has rejected all the charges.

Paddy Agnew

Dropped...Criscito was left out of Italy's Euro 2012 squad

HEROES & VILLAINS

JAVIER CANTERO

Independiente's new president has vowed to sever the Argentinian club's links with the Diablos Rojos hooligan gang despite being issued with bomb threats.

CRIS

The captain of French Cup winners Lyon invited the skipper of beaten finalists, third-tier Quevilly, to collect the trophy with him on the steps of the Stade de France.

Gesture...Cris (left) and Quevilly's Gregory Beaugrard

DIDIER DROGBA

Won the Champions League for Chelsea with his last-ever kick for the club before announcing he was leaving the Premier League club this summer.

RADAMEL FALCAO

Scored two goals for Atletico Madrid in the Europa League Final, to add to his winner for Porto in last year's Final. In so doing he became only the second player, after Brazil striker Ronaldo in 1997 and 1998, to score in successive European finals for different teams.

Another Final goal...Falcao

RYAN BABEL

The Hoffenheim forward tweeted himself into trouble, not for the first time, when he questioned on Twitter, whether the referee who sent him off in the league defeat at Hertha Berlin was on drugs.

A tweet...Babel got himself in trouble once again

JOEY BARTON

QPR's captain and midfielder was sent off on the final day of the Premier League season after elbowing Carlos Tevez. He also attempted to dead-leg Sergio Aguero and tried to head-butt Vincent Kompany as he left the pitch.

Not clever...Barton (right) argues with Tevez

SEREY DIE

Sion's Ivorian midfielder was suspended for eight games after he slapped a ball boy for not returning the ball quick enough during the Swiss side's 1-0 loss to Lausanne.

ROBERTO ASSIS

With Ronaldinho in dispute with Flamengo over wages, his brother (also his agent) took matters into his own hands and raided the club store, stealing over 40 items, including official shirts, hats and baby clothes.

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"Football is not fair sometimes, unfortunately. I cannot believe what I have just seen"

German FA president Wolfgang Niersbach reacts to Bayern Munich's Champions League Final defeat by Chelsea

GOALS we'd like to see again

1 PAPISS CISSE
Newcastle United v Chelsea
A superb curling volley, hit with the outside of his foot, that looped over Petr Cech and into the far corner.

2 RADAMEL FALCAO
Atletico Madrid v Athletic Bilbao
Bent a left-footed shot into the far corner for Atletico's first goal in the Europa League Final.

3 TOSHIHIRO AOYAMA
Sanfrecce Hiroshima v Yokohama Marinos
His powerful, looping shot from inside his own half totally catches out the Yokohama keeper.

4 ERIC HASSLI
Vancouver Whitecaps v Toronto
A precisely struck right-footed volley flies straight into the near top corner.

5 RADAMEL FALCAO
Atletico Madrid v America
Executes a stunning scissors-kick in an end-of-season friendly in Colombia.

6 LUCAS VIATRI
Boca Juniors v Racing
Flicks the ball over his marker before drilling a shot into the back of the net.

GOALS WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN
To see video footage of these goals, and many more we've selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to bit.ly/GX95Dn

WINNERS

LYDIA NSEKERA
The president of the Burundi FA is the first woman to be appointed to FIFA's executive committee.

JUVENTUS
Went the entire Serie A season undefeated – the first time that has happened in Italy since Milan in 1992 – to claim their first league title since 2003.

GALATASARAY
Equalled bitter rivals Fenerbahce when they won their 18th Turkish league title, despite failing to win any of their last three games.

LOSERS

ATHLETIC BILBAO
Some 400 fans flew to Budapest rather than the Europa League Final host city of Bucharest.

ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC
For the first time since 2003, when he was at Ajax, the Swede failed to be in a championship-winning side.

RIO FERDINAND
Omitted from Roy Hodgson's Euro 2012 squad three days after Man United saw the Premier League title snatched away from them in injury time by neighbours City.

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"Of course we're devastated. We would have given up our lives to win this Final"

Athletic Bilbao striker Fernando Llorente explains why many Basque tears were shed in the wake of their Europa League loss to Atletico Madrid

REPORTS we couldn't make up

1 Serbia's football association says midfielder Adem Ljajic has been suspended from the international team for failing to sing the national anthem before a friendly against Spain.

The association said new coach Sinisa Mihajlovic "sent Ljajic home" because he did not comply with his rules that stipulate players have to sing the anthem before matches.

A spokesperson said: "Ljajic has told Mihajlovic he refused to sing the national anthem out of personal beliefs and that there would be no change in his position regarding the matter."

2 There was a bizarre football/pop crossover moment at the end of the season when Internazionale's Javier Zanetti, took to the stage to sing on *Indonesian Idol*.

Zanetti appeared alongside team-mate Angelo Palombo as part of an Asian charm offensive by the Italian club...before stepping up to murder Eros Ramazzotti's song *Piu Bella Cosa*.

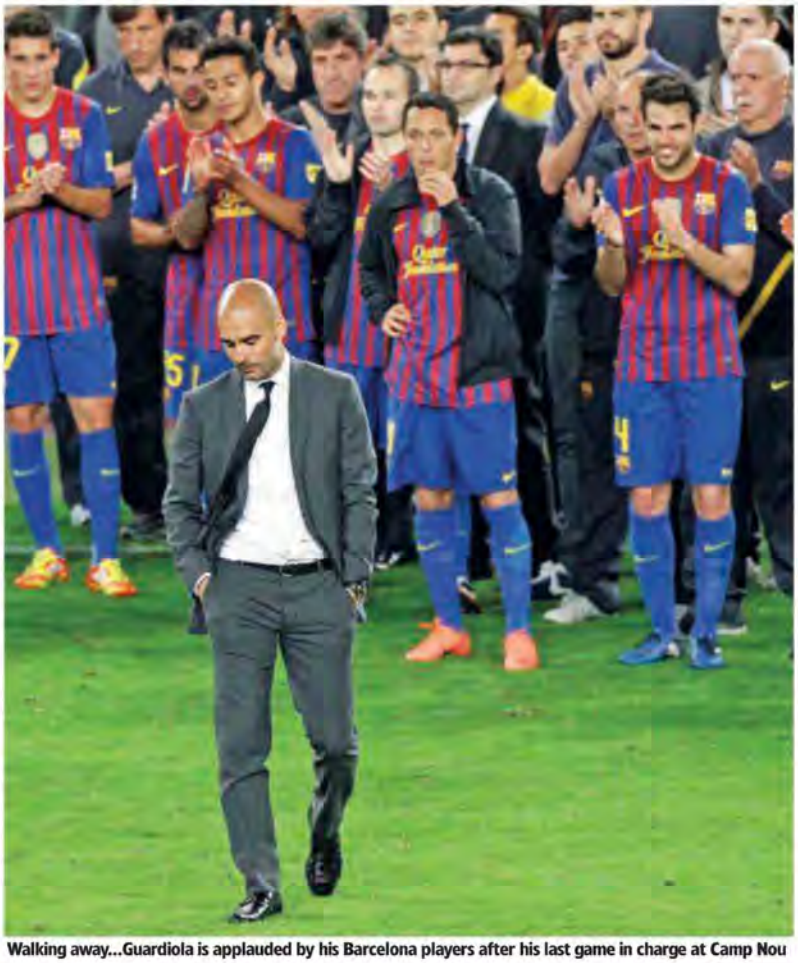
3 Yosmel De Armas, a Cuba international, is seeking asylum in the USA after disappearing from his team's hotel during an Olympic qualifying tournament in Nashville, Tennessee.

He played in the 4-0 defeat by El Salvador in March but then went missing prior to the 1-1 draw with Canada two days later.

Miami-based attorney Alex Solomiany, who is representing De Armas, said that he took a bus from Nashville and arrived in Miami without any belongings except for "the clothes on his back".

Solomiany added: "We're preparing an asylum application to file with the Department of Homeland Security."

He described De Armas as "nervous".



Walking away...Guardiola is applauded by his Barcelona players after his last game in charge at Camp Nou

SPAIN

Guardiola sets off on sabbatical with Chelsea on his mind

Pep Guardiola is expected to be out of football for as along as he wants to be. The 41-year-old left Barcelona after winning the Spanish Cup Final and plans to take a sabbatical for the next 12 months. But he knows there will be no shortage of offers if and when he decides to return.

"Offers will be pleasantly received," said Guardiola as he prepared to step down after four seasons in charge at Camp Nou. "But for the next months I have to charge my batteries, to charge my mind.

"I want to rest and I will wait. And I will be ready. If one club wants me and they seduce me, I will train again."

A Catalan, Guardiola is unlikely to join another Spanish club and there remains the possibility of him rejoining Barcelona at some point in the future. However, a more likely destination would be England, with Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich keen to recruit him to develop a Barca-style project in west London.

Guardiola won two Champions League titles, three La Liga crowns, one Spanish Cup, two European Super Cups and two Club World Cups. But the strain of managing the club took its toll and Guardiola declined to take up their offer of a new contract next season.

For now, backpacking and English language lessons await. But the call from Chelsea will not be far away. WS

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"First I was the king. Now I'm the worst coach in the world"

A Dutch champion with Twente in 2010, ex-England manager Steve McClaren failed to repeat the magic in his second spell at the club

EUROPE

Big names bow out

Some of the biggest names in European football have retired or announced they will be leaving the continent for new challenges this summer.

Holland striker Ruud Van Nistelrooy announced his retirement at the age of 35 having played a final season at Malaga. Van Nistelrooy also played for Den Bosch, Heerenveen, PSV, Manchester United, Real Madrid and Hamburg, and scored 35 goals in 70 internationals.

Raul declined the offer of a contract extension with Schalke and announced he would be joining Qatar club Al Sadd on a one-year deal. The former Spain striker, who scored 27 goals in 63 Bundesliga appearances for Schalke, insisted that he could not return to Spain to play for anyone other than Real Madrid.

Alessandro Del Piero played his last game for Juventus in their defeat by Napoli in the Italian Cup Final. The 37-year-old, who made more than 700 appearances for Juventus, has been heavily linked with a move to Major League Soccer.

And Milan bid farewell to a number of veteran players. Alessandro Nesta left after 10 years at the club, with the USA seeming to be his most likely destination. Clarence Seedorf signalled his intention to sign for Brazilian club Botafogo, while Gennaro Gattuso and Gianluca Zambrotta also departed.

Send off...Van Nistelrooy scored five goals in 32 games in his farewell season with Malaga

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Lucky Di Matteo proves it is easier to destroy than to create

Roberto Di Matteo's remarkable triumph with Chelsea in the Champions League was in a fine tradition of managers of English clubs winning the European Cup within a few months of taking charge of the team.

It most closely resembled, perhaps, the unlikely glory of Tony Barton, the unsung assistant who guided Aston Villa to triumph against Bayern Munich in the 1982 Final. Thirty years on, Bayern were once again the fall guys to an interim manager who had fostered a keen team spirit, relied on counter-attacking verve and ridden his luck with quiet dignity.

Joe Fagan (1984) also won the European Cup in his first season as boss at Liverpool. So did Rafa Benitez (2005), while Jimmy Armfield (Leeds United, 1975) and Avram Grant (Chelsea, 2008) both reached the Final.

John Terry may quickly find himself to be yesterday's man

Of these men, however, only Benitez can be said to have subsequently flourished in the role, but he captured just a single further piece of significant silverware: the FA Cup 12 months later.

Barton struggled and within two years had joined Northampton Town after being sacked by Villa. Armfield lasted three more relatively mundane seasons at Leeds, while Fagan had only another year at Liverpool.

Grant was immediately discarded by Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich, who once again, in the wake of Di Matteo's victory, faces a decision about what to do with an interim boss.

This time there was no instant verdict from the billionaire Russian owner. He could hear well enough the insistent cry in the media that Di Matteo "deserved" the chance to become the permanent boss – and it must have struck some chord of fairness in his soul. Yet "deserve" is a difficult word to bandy around in sport.

It implies a moral element to decisions. Yet, if you looked at Chelsea's progress in the Champions League another way, you could just as forcefully argue that they hardly "deserved" to overcome Barcelona and Bayern Munich playing a brand of deeply negative football that resembled nothing so much as the unloved catenaccio of Internazionale in the mid -1960s.

Any objective analysis would have to acknowledge that if Di Matteo had done a good job in steadying the Chelsea ship, he was also blessed with far more good fortune than many managers have in years of work.

He will be seriously lucky again should Abramovich decide he is the future of the club. It is far easier to destroy than create in football. And while Di Matteo has proved he can fashion a brand of successful "total defence", there is nothing in his previous managerial career to suggest he can create a new generation of stylish Chelsea play.

If Abramovich is truly beguiled by the Barcelona model, as rumours suggest, then many other men will have been on his radar, with Pep Guardiola an obvious first-choice target. You would also have to say that, in no particular order, Joachim Low, David Moyes, Marcelo Bielsa, Frank Rijkaard and Walter Mazzarri would also be on his list.

The Champions League Final was an astonishing occasion, and not just because a German team failed in the penalty shoot-out – and on their home ground.

We saw a Chelsea team perform with immense defensive strength even though their captain, John Terry, was suspended. The pairing of Gary Cahill and David Luiz suggested that it will not only be Didier Drogba for whom a generational shift at Chelsea will have implications.

After scoring the winning spot-kick, Drogba announced he would be leaving Chelsea in a rare example of a sportsman quitting at the very top. Terry, for so long the heart of the club, may quickly find himself to be yesterday's man as well – whoever the new permanent manager is.

UEFA should also look back at this Final and institute change. It was surely wrong, and avoidable, to have one of the clubs playing on home turf. It was also an affront to see suspended players cavorting on the field in playing kit in the celebrations. WS

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"The call-up was totally unexpected. I listened to my voicemail during a break in school and there was a message from Joachim Low"

Julian Draxler, the 18-year-old who combines playing for Schalke with studying for his A-levels, on his selection in Germany's provisional Euro 2012 squad

OBITUARY: GIORGIO CHINAGLIA (1947-2012)

A striker whose only passion was goals

A turbulent, difficult man, Giorgio Chinaglia. Most, probably all, of his problems were self-inflicted, and it's fair to say that living a life of turmoil suited him. He thrived on controversy. In his autobiography, *Chinaglia!*, he boasted gleefully of how he always insisted on honesty and speaking his mind, which landed him in trouble time and again.

Indeed, when Chinaglia joined New York Cosmos in 1976 he was preceded by a reputation as a talented but fiery tempered player, probably best known for the incident during the 1974 World Cup, when Italy coach Ferruccio Valcareggi substituted him against Haiti. Chinaglia stormed off the field, swore at his coach and gave him the finger, and then started throwing and breaking water bottles in the locker room.

There were really two Chinaglias. One had a soft, Welsh-inflected English voice, sparkling eyes and a fetching, boyish grin, a charmer with a light sense of humour of whom one heard stories of his kindness and generosity.

But there was also Chinaglia the bully, who openly flaunted his power at Cosmos where his close friendship with the boss, Steve Ross, made him virtually untouchable. Chinaglia often had it in for referees, threatening them with banishment and on one occasion violently pushing one. No disciplinary action was taken in that case, nor was there any punishment after Chinaglia punched Julio Cesar Romero in the face during a Cosmos training session.

Then there was the football. No one ever chanted "there's only one Giorgio Chinaglia", but it would have been totally true, totally apt.

As a player, Chinaglia stood at the boundary between old and new. He wore the number nine shirt and looked the part: big, muscular and fearless. But he was a very different animal from those old centre-forwards. Not particularly known for his heading, he had a much wider range of skills.

His game was devoted, entirely, to scoring goals. He once told me, when we were discussing great games of the past, goals were the only thing that mattered. "If it's 0-0 then to me it's boring," he declared. "Even if it was a great game."

He fashioned a new style of play as a big man who could move lightly and exchange rapid short passes, who could shoot thunderously, who could reel off impeccable bicycle-kicks and scissor-volleys. All in the name of scoring goals.

But Chinaglia's methods included a heavy dose of something the modern game did not want: selfishness. He did not create space, he did not track back, he did little defending. He stayed upfield where he was deadly, with 242 goals in 254 games for Cosmos. Even so, the selfishness was controlled - there were always plenty of assists on his stat sheets.

Winner...Chinaglia celebrates after New York Cosmos beat Seattle Sounders 1-0 in the 1982 NASL Soccer Bowl in San Diego

For the first five of his eight-year Cosmos career he got help - some believed crucial help - from the North American Soccer League's 35-yard-line rule, which meant he could save energy because defenders could not push him back to the halfway line. The rule was dropped after the 1980 season, but Chinaglia, at 34, was still the league's leading scorer in 1981 and 1982.

Sadly, centre-forwards did not turn into the Chinaglia version, becoming instead a lumbering target man who was good "with his back to goal" – a phrase he found ridiculous.

No one would have called Chinaglia an elegant player - he reserved his elegance for the post-game locker room, where he would sit in his designer dressing gown, sipping Chivas Regal. But he was a skilled player who brought immense excitement - and goals - to every game. Football could do with a generation of Chinaglia clones.

Paul Gardner

From Swansea to New York

***Azzurri*...Chinaglia (back row, far left) before the World Cup game v Haiti**

Born in Italy in 1947, Chinaglia grew up in Wales and began his career with Swansea Town before returning home in 1966. Having been a professional abroad, he was banned from the Italian top flight for three years and played for Massese and Internapoli before getting his chance in Serie A with Lazio. His 98 goals in 209 league appearances for Lazio earned him international recognition and he won 14 caps for Italy, scoring twice and playing in two matches at the 1974 World Cup. He moved to Cosmos in 1976 and retired in 1983 as the NASL's all-time leading scorer.

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■ OBITUARIES

Pioneer...Bocande helped put Senegal football on the map

Jules BOCANDE (1958-2012)
One of the pioneers of African football, he was capped 73 times by Senegal between 1979 and 1983, scoring 20 goals. He later coached the national team, leading them to the quarter-finals of the 1994 African Nations Cup.

The dreadlocked Bocande also worked as assistant coach to Frenchman Bruno Metsu as Senegal stunned the world by reaching the 2002 World Cup quarter-finals.

Bocande was one of the first Senegalese to play professionally in Europe. He was the French league's top scorer in the 1985-86 season with 23 goals for Metz, and also had spells with Paris Saint-Germain, Nice and Lens.

He died following an operation at a hospital in Metz. His funeral, at the national cathedral in Dakar, was attended by thousands.

George KNOBEL (1922-2012)
Former Ajax and Holland coach who led his country to third place at Euro 1976.

Rashidi YEKINI (1963-2012)
African footballer of the year in 1993, he scored Nigeria's first-ever goal in the World Cup finals in 1994. See Dispatches, page 30.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

Can fans be journalists and can journalists be fans?

I have always believed - and as far as my 52-year sportswriting career goes, I do mean always - that it is a basic requirement of a sports journalist that the writer must not be a fan of a particular club. Or of a particular country, for that matter. But it is something that I've been wondering about for quite a while now, trying to make up my mind whether or not I'm a prisoner to a way of thinking that has simply had its day.

Lately, I find what seems to me an increasing number of top writers whom I know and respect who openly sing of their love for a club. One (an American) has written of how he felt he needed a club to support if he was going to be a soccer writer and how he set about choosing one. Another (also American) writes his stories openly - and often brilliantly - from the point of view of his beloved club.

I have always been aware of a difficulty with my argument. Namely, that most football writers - probably all of us - got involved in the sport first as a fan. And those boyhood loves die hard. Likely, they can never be erased, but I've maintained that it is the task of a professional to move on, to take a more detached view of the sport. To appreciate the essence of fandom – and why not, when it has been experienced? – but to resist the bias that inevitably accompanies it.

> If sports journalism is merely to reflect what the fans feel then I see little future for it

The warning "no cheering in the press box" dates back as far as I can remember, indicating that misplaced fandom has been a problem for a long time.

For sure, Nick Hornby's novel *Fever Pitch* did a superb job of capturing the sweetness and sorrow of being a fan, the way that the experience can come to rule a life. But it did more. It brutally exposed the unacceptable face of fandom: its hollowness, its lack of logic, the ultimate silliness of intelligent people coming to believe that just because a group of men wear shirts of a particular colour somehow means that they always have right on their side.

None of that is to be belittled, because trifling and witless experiences are a vital part of ordinary life, and they are frequently its most enjoyable part. But a football writer must take his chosen subject seriously. I don't mean sombrely; I mean that he must be able to resist the temptation to form judgments based on shirt colours.

When he watches and analyses a game he must see 22 players, not just 11, and must apply the same judgments to each one.

I do not see any other way of becoming an expert - and sports journalists are supposed to be experts, no? Well, maybe. Again, the seeds of doubt threaten. The very concept of objectivity is under fire as being an impossible conceit. The internet is now bristling with blogs from fans. One soccer website features dozens of stories openly headlined as having been written by fans. If sports journalism is merely to reflect what fans feel, then I see little future for it – not least because journalists expect to be paid for their work, fans do not.

Yet it remains my belief that sports journalists should not be fans. Fans of the sport itself, or of a certain way of playing it, yes - that is fandom based on reason, fandom without the suffocating emotional involvement of club fandom.

I am also aware that the image of a sports journalist that I am outlining may not sound greatly appealing - he sounds too calm, too objective, too clever, something of a snob looking down on, and patiently putting up with, the childish amusements of the masses. A prig, in other words. But it should not be difficult for football writers to avoid that tag as they work close to the enthusiasm at the grass-roots level. The necessity, I believe, is to avoid being influenced by its skewed judgment values. But I'm no longer sure that is a generally held opinion. WS

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"Only the Chelsea fans will be happy. I'd rather do it the Ajax way. Better not to win the Champions League, than to do it in this fashion"

Johan Cruyff reflects on Chelsea's Champions League victory

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

National job... Mihajlovic

EUROPE

SINISA MIHAJLOVIC was appointed Serbia coach on a two-year contract, replacing Vladimir Petrovic who quit last year. The former Yugoslavia international previously coached Bologna, Catania and Fiorentina in Serie A.

Having taken temporary control in March, **ANDREA STRAMACCIONI** signed a permanent, three-year deal to coach Internazionale.

MAURICIO PELLEGRINO took charge of Valencia after Unai Emery quit the Spanish club to join Spartak Moscow.

Arsenal signed striker **LUKAS PODOLSKI** from Cologne for £12million, while Werder Bremen midfielder **MARKO MARIN** joined Chelsea for £6.5m.

MARKUS WEINZIERL, who led Jahn Regensburg into the German second tier, took over at top-flight Augsburg.

Germany goalkeeper **TIM WIESE** and Switzerland striker **EREN DERDIYOK** have joined Hoffenheim from Werder Bremen and Bayer Leverkusen respectively.

Former Ligue 1-winning coach **CLAUDE PUEL**, who took Monaco to the title in 2000, replaced **RENE MARSIGLIA** at Nice. Marsiglia was sacked at the end of the season after leading the side to a 4-3 win over Lyon to ensure the club's survival in the French top flight.

PIETRO GHEDIN, who was previously coach of the Italian women's team, took charge of Malta's national men's team. Italy's 1982 World Cup winner **ANTONIO CABRINI** took over from Ghedin with the ladies' side.

Groningen handed **ROBERT MAASKANT** a one-year deal after sacking coach Pieter Huistra following a disappointing 14th-place finish in the Eredivisie.

OSCAR GARCIA left his position with Barcelona's youth team to become first-team coach of Israeli side Maccabi Tel Aviv.

Former Chelsea and Internazionale coach **CLAUDIO RANIERI** has taken charge of French second division side Monaco.

Wolverhampton Wanderers, who were relegated from the Premier League, appointed former Cologne coach **STALE SOLBAKKEN** as their new manager. Caretaker boss **TERRY CONNOR,** who had been in charge since the sacking of Mick McCarthy in early February, will retain a role as part of the backroom staff after 13 years' service with the club.

MANUEL SANCHEZ replaced former Spain boss **JAVIER CLEMENTE** as coach of Sporting Gijon, who were relegated from La Liga.

SOUTH AMERICA

NORBERTO PELUFFO replaced Santiago Escobar as coach of Atletico Nacional on the eve of their Libertadores Cup last-16 tie against Velez Sarsfield, but he could not prevent the Colombian side from being eliminated.

Gremio signed former Bayern Munich and Brazil midfielder **ZE ROBERTO** from Al Gharafa of Qatar, and left-back **FABIO AURELIO** from Liverpool. Other Brazilian deals included ex-Everton striker **JO** joining Atletico Mineiro from Internacional, **TINGA** moving from Internacional to Cruzeiro and one-time Milan goalkeeper **DIDA** coming out of retirement to sign for Corinthians.

Former Uruguay national coach **JORGE FOSSATI**, who led Al Sadd to last year's AFC Champions League title, left the Qatari club for Paraguayan side Cerro Porteno.

New start...Fossati

CONCACAF

Cayman Islands president **JEFFREY WEBB** was elected president of CONCACAF, replacing Jack Warner who resigned in June 2010 after 20 years in office. Antigua & Barbuda general-secretary **GORDON DERRICK** replaced Warner as president of the Caribbean Football Union.

Former Italy striker **MARCO DI VAIO** joined Montreal Impact from Bologna.

Impact player...Di Vaio

Mexican club Guadalajara appointed former Melbourne Heart boss **JOHN VAN'T SCHIP** as their new coach.

AFRICA

Ex-France midfielder **SABRI LAMOUCHI** was appointed Ivory Coast coach, taking over from **FRANCOIS ZAHOUI** who was sacked.

Chinese way...Lippi (left)

Lippi takes Chinese challenge

Italy's 2006 World Cup-winning coach **MARCELLO LIPPI** replaced Lee Jang-soo at Guangzhou Evergrande, despite the South Korean taking the club to the top of the Chinese Super League and into the knockout stage of the AFC Champions League. The club also signed Borussia Dortmund and Paraguay striker **LUCAS BARRIOS** for a reported £7million.

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"This is only the beginning. Most of my squad will not be in their prime until 2016"

Jose Mourinho promises more of the same after Real Madrid's La Liga victory

Appointments, sackings and loans

PAULO DUARTE, who was sacked by Burkina Faso after this year's Nations Cup, was put in charge of Gabon, while **KAETU SMITH** was named coach of Liberia. Tanzania replaced Danish coach Jan Poulsen with countryman **KIM POULSEN**. Gambia appointed Italian **LUCIANO MANCINI**.

Former Finland and South Africa coach **STUART BAXTER** replaced Vladimir Vermezovic in charge of Kaizer Chiefs. Chiefs also signed South Africa right-back **SIBONISO GAXA** from Belgian side Lierse.

HOSSAM EL BADRY has returned to Al Ahly to replace Manuel Jose. The 52-year-old, who was previously coach of ENPPI, led Al Ahly to the Egyptian Premier League title in 2010.

CHABUR GOR ALEI was elected president of the South Sudan Football Association.

ASIA

JOHN ALOISI is the new coach of Melbourne Heart, **TONY POPOVIC** is in charge of the A-League's new but as yet unnamed club, and former Norwich City midfielder **IAN CROOK** replaced Vitezslav Lavicka as coach of Sydney.

Heart... Aloisi

Ex-Yokohama F.Marinos boss **KOKICHI KIMURA** took charge of Laos' national team.

EUROPE

KENNY DALGLISH was sacked by Liverpool after winning the League Cup, while Aston Villa sacked **ALEX McLEISH** less than 24 hours after the end of the Premier League season.

Former Liverpool and England striker **MICHAEL OWEN** was released by Manchester United after they decided against offering him a new contract.

AEK Athens defender **TRAIANOS DELLAS**, who was a Euro winner with Greece in 2004, has retired.

PSV Eindhoven striker **JAN VENNEGOOR OF HESSELINK** retired from football at the age of 33.

End...Vennegoor of Hesselink (right)

Former Spain and Real Madrid defender **FERNANDO HIERRO** resigned as Malaga's director of football.

CHRISTIAN PANUCCI quit as director of sport at Palermo after being in the job for just over a month. Panucci was reported to be unhappy about comments from the Italian club's volatile president, Maurizio Zamparini, which appeared in the press.

Dijon parted company with coach **PATRICE CARTERON** following their relegation from Ligue 1.

AFRICA

ROGER MILLA, the 1987 African footballer of the year, was stripped of his role as honorary president of the Cameroon Football Federation.

PIERRE LECHANTRE, who led Cameroon to victory in the African Nations Cup in 2000, stepped down as coach of Senegal after just two weeks.

ALAIN GIRESSE, who coached Mali to third place in this year's African Nations Cup, did not renew his contract.

Kaiserslautern's **ANTAR YAHIA**, Al Sadd wing-back **NADIR BELHADJ** and Eintracht Frankfurt midfielder **KARIM MATMOUR** have all announced their international retirement and will no longer represent Algeria.

Orlando Pirates goalkeeper **MOENEEB JOSEPHS** retired from international football with South Africa at the age of 32.

Former Arsenal, Fulham and West Ham United striker **LUIS BOA MORTE** quit Orlando Pirates after less than four months at the South African club. The 34-year-old former Portugal international made only two starts.

HASSAN SHEHATA, who led the national team to successive African Nations Cup triumphs in 2006, 2008 and 2010, quit as coach of Zamalek after a reported row with the Egyptian club's midfielder Shikabala.

Row...Shehata

The reigning African champions, Esperance of Tunisia, parted company with coach **MICHEL DECASTEL**.

OUT

Quit...Josephs

Rossi sacked after Ljajic fight

Fiorentina sacked coach **DELIO ROSSI** after he attacked his own team's midfielder Adem Ljajic during a 2-2 draw with Novara.

The incident happened when the player expressed his dissent at being substituted after 32 minutes. The Italian league banned the 51-year-old for three months.

In the capital, **EDOARDO REJA** resigned as coach of Lazio and **LUIS ENRIQUE** quit at Roma.

Dismissed...Rossi was also hit with a three-month ban after punching one of his players

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Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Hate brigade...Ukrainian and Russian neo-Nazis during a nationalist parade in the Ukrainian city of Lviv in April

Ukraine, a ludicrous choice for a tournament

Sad, but hardly surprising, that the relatives of certain black England players should decide not to make the trip to Ukraine for fear of racial harassment, while black England fans have been officially warned, not least by Sol Campbell, to be on their guard.

My mind goes back to an incident at the 2006 World Cup in Germany when the Ukraine team and its opponents were lined up before kick-off, taking part in a solemn affirmation of opposition to racism.

At the end of the Ukrainian contingent stood their manager, Oleg Blokhin, arguably the finest player that country has produced. Only weeks earlier he had emitted a furious attack on black footballers, saying they were not wanted in Ukraine. I have no record that FIFA, allegedly pursuing their monumentally hypocritical Kick Out Racism campaign, did anything about it or him.

Ukraine, racism apart, was always a ludicrous choice to host a major tournament, with its primitive communications and dubious aircraft, not to mention the abysmal lack of hotels, especially in Donetsk.

> Blokhin emitted a furious attack on black footballers, saying they were not wanted in Ukraine but FIFA did nothing

Blazer brigade have nowhere to hide

Jack Warner is threatening revenge on those who cast him out of authority and there can be little doubt that he knows where any number of bodies are buried.

Now, belatedly, he is being pursued for exploitation of a stadium built in his native Trinidad. Yet if you glance through the devastating pages of Andrew Jennings' book *Foul!* you will find nauseating evidence of Warner's relations with an ever-indulgent Sepp Blatter – who might well now find himself in the line of fire. As, indeed, does Chuck Blazer, who not long ago blew the whistle on Warner, whose seemingly loyal and supportive deputy

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Champions...skipper Vincent Kompany lifts the trophy as Manchester City celebrate winning the Premier League

he had long been at CONCACAF.

Blazer swears that the huge sums which accrued to him while running CONCACAF were legitimately acquired, but the walls must be closing in.

City's title was a shabby victory

The conclusion of Manchester City's breathless last game against Queens Park Rangers, to win the Premier League, was arguably more ironic than dramatic, against a team reduced for the last half hour to 10 men, thanks to the violent excesses of Joey Barton.

It didn't surprise me in the least that, almost immediately, a book by Colin Shindler, once a successful TV drama producer, always a devoted City fan, declared that he could take no pleasure at all in the club's achievements, bought as they were with the inexhaustible billions of Sheikh Mansour and his colleagues...with reportedly an extra £400million to come from Abu Dhabi, thus neatly circumventing the forthcoming supposed UEFA clampdown on outrageous spending.

Name and venue apart, there is nothing "Mancunian" about the present City team. That is in stark contrast with the one which had last won the championship back in 1968; a team whose wing-halves – Mike Doyle, a passionate City loyalist and United foe, and Alan Oakes – were both Mancunian, as was Neil Young, their fast and elegant forward.

It is all too tempting to say that City didn't win the Premier League: they bought it.

Roy is on a hiding to nothing

Roy Hodgson, meanwhile, is still the object of what the scientist Pavlov might have called "alternating stimuli". Varying from contemptible criticisms of his accent, to a despicable attempt by reporters who should have known better to cull negative responses at Bayern Munich from manager Jupp Heynckes and such players as Philipp Lahm and Bastian Schweinsteiger. The irony being, as it quickly emerged, that Hodgson could probably have managed the German international team had he not kept his bargain with Blackburn Rovers – who were destined to sack him anyway. So much for loyalty.

> The irony is that Hodgson could have managed Germany had he not kept his bargain with Blackburn Rovers

No, I cannot believe that England under Roy, or anybody else for that matter, will do anything of note in the coming European Championship. Already team and manager have a ball and chain around the leg with the absence of Wayne Rooney, the sole English striker of real quality, from the first two games. If England get through their qualifying group with the resources they have it would surely be a substantial achievement.

Meanwhile, England fans will doubtless be reassured by an official warning that Ukrainian police could both beat and rob them.

Oh, what happy days to come.

Did Di Matteo need to be so negative?

And Chelsea? A gloriously dramatic success in that European Cup Final, but may we take a step backwards and see it in some kind of perspective. All credit to Roberto Di Matteo for so successfully and remarkably turning the team round, even if, twice against Barcelona, and against Bayern in the Final, they essentially won wars of attrition.

Yet even without their suspended players, did they really have to take such a defensive attitude against Bayern, who also lacked three of their regulars and only the previous weekend, with every man on board, had been humiliated 5-2 in Berlin by Borussia Dortmund in the German Cup Final? A score which surely denoted a defence of extreme vulnerability, which could well have succumbed before Didier Drogba scored that stupendous equaliser.

Drogba also made generous reference to Fernando Torres, who for his part publicly lamented the way he had so often been excluded during a season in which, until the final weeks, his form had been abysmal. The idea that he could comfortably succeed Drogba as leader of the attack is risible. With his tremendous power and deadly finishing Drogba, even at 34, remains a dynamic and formidable leader.

Torres at his best – for those who can remember – had electric pace and splendid technique, but even in form needs a specific type of ball, ideally ahead of him. He can never battle the way Drogba can.

Of course Di Matteo deserved to stay in charge, of course Roman Abramovich continues to hope fervently for Pep Guardiola, who apparently has made encouraging noises. But at Barcelona Guardiola was dealing with teams largely composed of players brought up almost from boyhood in the Barcelona pattern.

Does Abramovich really believe that even with huge expenditure he is going to be able easily to build a Barcelona at Stamford Bridge? WS

Passionate...Di Matteo tries to rally his players before extra time in the Champions League Final

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Devil in the detail

Roy Hodgson's career has been characterised by his attention to detail, says Keir Radnedge

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In 1994 Roy Hodgson was the coach who took Switzerland to the World Cup finals in the United States. Every moment was a learning experience – right down to his surprise at being ticked off for smoking one of his celebratory cigars out in the gardens of the team's hotel.

Minor point? A little thing? Inconsequential? On its own, maybe, but being in charge of a national team is all about discovering and then maintaining as sharp a grip on the detail as on the grand picture.

This is the reason Hodgson – as long as the Football Association keeps the faith and is not panicked by a few bad results or scruffy performances – was the best man for the England job. Perhaps there would have been more appropriate foreign candidates but, after the disturbances of the Fabio Capello regime, the reversion to a home-grown boss was inevitable.

Hodgson is almost certainly the best-qualified manager the FA has ever appointed. Certainly, he was a modest player with none of the trophies and trinkets of a Kevin Keegan or a Capello. But he knew the professional game as a player and has managed in both the northern and southern hemisphere, working with everyone from the willing part-timers of Norway and Sweden to the ultra-pros of Internazionale.

He supported himself in his early, part-time years as a teacher, picking up more experience which would prove invaluable in his later dealings with the occasional naughty pupil in football.

He knows international football from his work with Switzerland, Finland and the UAE; he also knows – a singular, costly gap in Capello's original CV – international tournament football.

Taking a national team to a finals, whether a World Cup or European Championship, is a rare experience which demands thorough long-term planning to cover all the possibilities of personnel potential and problems, but also an understanding of the personality of a nation's football.

> He knows national team football – he also knows international tournament football

That is why some managers prefer an air of seclusion at a tournament, while others – such as Holland's Bert Van Marwijk – prefer sociability.

Hodgson has had no input into the logistics, but he is not a tournament novice. That is important not only for his approach to Euro 2012 but also for the way he brings England out of it, whatever the results this summer.

Also, Hodgson not only knows the English footballer, he knows his psyche – and he understands enough of both to know that, whatever his personal predilections for Milan Kundera and Martin Amis, quoting them on the training pitch is not an option.

The young Hodgson played and, in truth, failed at Crystal Palace, Gravesend & Northfleet, Maidstone United and elsewhere on the old Southern League circuit. So he went out to South Africa at the behest of Bob Houghton. Hodgson ▸

Celebrations...hoisted by his Halmstad squad after their 1976 title win

Success...Hodgson celebrates after Switzerland's win over Romania at the 1994 World Cup

Young boss...with the Bristol City board after becoming caretaker manager

Relaxing...Hodgson after leading Malmo to the 1986 Swedish title

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Robson's legacy

Hodgson is a worthy successor to former England manager Bobby Robson, says Patrick Barclay

Roy Hodgson can give English football back its Englishness. His roots as a coach lie in a culture to reckon with – his original tutor was Bobby Robson, and he also learned from the likes of Don Howe and Dave Sexton. And if he can recreate the fertility of bygone decades his life in the game will have been eminently worthwhile and his service to his country recognised. As long as he doesn't lose at home to Croatia on a wet night...

That the England job is result-driven was emphasised by the sad departure of Steve McClaren, following the FA hierarchy's first attempt to deviate from the policy they had short-sightedly chosen in hiring Sven Goran Eriksson in 2001. McClaren, Eriksson's erstwhile assistant, left after failing to qualify for the European Championship of 2008 and the FA then made the odd decision to revert to a foreigner, in this case Fabio Capello, whose reputation had been made solely in club football.

It was an expensive mistake that a relatively new FA chairman, David Bernstein, resolved not to repeat. There are many reasons why a football country of England's stature – such as Brazil, Argentina, Germany, Italy, France and Holland – should develop a habit of appointing indigenous national coaches. One is a matter of principle, but most of the others are practical: you tend to have to pay a lot more in terms of the salaries of the coach and his assistants, for example, thus diverting resources from the core activities of a national association such as youth coaching.

But the best reason was impressed on Hodgson many years ago when he was with Blackburn Rovers. A high-ranking official of the German FA asked if he would be interested in taking charge of their national team, which was going through a lean spell. Flattered, Hodgson let his name go forward to a meeting at which the unthinkable – the appointment of a foreigner - would be thought about. The word came back that it had been decided not to do something that might weaken the German coaching system at all levels. Instead of expediency, the Germans worked through their problems.

Thinking in the long term

Now the English appear to be thinking in the long term. The FA have all but finished their national football centre - St George's Park at Burton-upon-Trent, which might already be in operation had previous regimes not wasted so many millions of pounds on Eriksson and Capello – and Hodgson will be joined by a director of football in co-ordinating the national effort at all age groups. This is not to deny that his continued employment will stand or fall on the performances of the men's senior team. But for the coaches to have a home that could become a crucible for ideas is important too, as it brings England into line with countries which, unlike themselves, have won trophies since 1966.

New regulations for the development of children's skills through small-sided matches are also a triumph for Bernstein and the longer-established director of football development, Trevor Brooking, whose contribution to the reform of the English game should not be underrated. But it is Hodgson who epitomises the change from star worship, as demonstrated by the initial idolatry of Eriksson and Capello, to practical progress. Hodgson knows the job and did it very well on behalf of both Switzerland and Finland.

It was after his Swiss experience that I first campaigned for his appointment by England. I thought he would have been a more sensible choice than Kevin Keegan in 1998 – after the ludicrous dismissal of Glenn Hoddle – and would certainly have preferred him to Eriksson or Capello, distinguished though both of them may have become on the club scene. International football is different and the rhythm demands both clarity and a hands-on approach. And Hodgson has always done his own coaching.

Despite the amount of time he has spent working abroad, he also has a keen understanding of the English mentality. He is a football intellectual – and something of a personal one – who talks straight and will not complicate matters. Whether Hodgson has enough time in which to introduce a pattern of play that can bring success at Euro 2012 remains to be seen. But Bernstein has stressed that his mission extends to the World Cup two years hence and beyond and he does have the basis of a team – Wayne Rooney, Ashley Young, Joe Hart and others – that can be developed.

The sound of his very first training session with the national squad was telling: he was heard telling the midfield players not to worry about hitting the "big man" – Andy Carroll, the young Liverpool centre-forward – with the ball early. Yes, Hodgson is English and with no intention of apologising for it, for all his cosmopolitan sophistication. If he has his way, the English coach will not be unfashionable for much longer.

Bobby Robson would be proud of him.

ROY HODGSON FACT FILE

1947
Born August 9 in Croydon, Surrey
1965-75
Player with Crystal Palace, various non-league clubs and then South African side Berea Park
1976
Started managerial career with Halmstad in Sweden and won two championships
1980
Joined Bristol City as assistant to Bob Houghton
1982
Appointed manager at Bristol City, but dismissed within four months and returned to Sweden with Orebro and Malmo, where he won five leagues and two cups
1990
Left Sweden for Switzerland, taking over at Neuchatel Xamax
1992
Became coach of Switzerland, who he took to 1994 World Cup in the USA then qualified them for Euro 96. Was beaten nine times in 40 games

Subsequent managerial appointments:
1995-97 Internazionale (Ita)
1997-98 Blackburn Rovers
1999 Internazionale (interim)
1999-2000 Grasshoppers (Swi)
2000-01 Copenhagen (Den)
2001 Udinese (Ita)
2002-04 United Arab Emirates
2004-05 Viking (Nor)
2006-07 Finland
2007-10 Fulham
2010-11 Liverpool
2011-12 West Bromwich Albion
2012-present England

England expects...Hodgson lays down the law during training

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England debut...Hodgson fronts the bench during the 1-0 win over Norway in Oslo

once described his playing career as "inglorious", but he learned the basics and disciplines which provided the foundations for a manager who has impressed so many of his players since.

Management began under Houghton at Sweden's Halmstad, where he won two league titles in four years. He then followed Houghton home to Bristol City, where – although not his fault – it all ended in tears with the club's bankruptcy, so it was back to Sweden with Oddevold, Orebro and then Malmo.

Common denominator

Five successive league titles brought a move to Switzerland, with Neuchatel Xamax, and then the Switzerland national team. Hodgson found a formula which proved a common denominator for players from within the country's contrasting cultures.

The result was their first appearance at the World Cup finals in 28 years. Hodgson qualified them for Euro 96 as well but conceded the chance of prodigal success to take up an offer he could not refuse from Inter.

One of the players he found there, and turned around, was Paul Ince. The former Manchester United midfielder recalled a key to the Hodgson persona which may be masked from the TV-watching world by his low-key manner. Ince said: "He's a very strong-minded person. He doesn't mind what others say. If he feels it's the right way to go, it is."

The right way to go, tactically, then and now, was 4-4-2 – like Sven Goran Eriksson, one of his predecessors. Eriksson believed in 4-4-2 because he thought it offered tactical clarity, which players could understand easily. It does not overburden any particular role and guarantees a support system for any player on the ball in any position.

This clarity is crucial for national teams and national coaches. As almost all lament, they lack significant time with the players, so simplicity is key. They must make their tactics fit their players, not vice-versa – a twist Capello did not understand until almost too late. A club manager has an input into the style and tactical talent of his players, a national manager does not. He cannot impose his own tactical quirks and preferences, he has to find a way to make the best of what he is handed.

Hodgson, for all his success abroad, has had his ups and downs in English management with Blackburn Rovers, Fulham (comparative success with a Europa League Final), Liverpool (comparative failure amid boardroom chaos) and West Bromwich Albion (rescued from the brink of relegation).

Now, with England, he may feel he has earned a tactical bonus labelled

> "When you have a player like Rooney, it would be strange to go with just one forward"

Wayne Rooney: the ideal player to fill the "other" slot in the attacking "two".

Hodgson, as he noted after his winning debut in the 1-0 warm-up success over Norway in Oslo, is looking beyond Euro 2012, where Rooney will miss the first two games through suspension. Hodgson's main target – and test – will be the 2014 World Cup.

He said: "Two strikers will be the way forward during my time with England because we have Rooney. We don't have him for the first two matches at the Euros, but that is a temporary thing.

"There is a lot of football to be played after the Euros and when you have a player like Rooney, who is excellent in that position, it would seem a bit strange if we just went with one lone forward."

The late Arthur Rowe, Tottenham Hotspur's "push-and-run" manager at the turn of the 1950s, once remarked: "Football is a simple game, it's players who make it complicated."

Hodgson's choice will mean keeping it simple...and drawing on his experience of the importance of every little detail. **WS**

ENGLAND'S NEW BREED

Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain

With injuries depleting the squad, the young Arsenal winger was set to play a more important role in central midfield at Euro 2012.

Steven Gerrard

Hodgson's choice as captain for Euro 2012 and a key figure in integrating new blood into the squad.

Andy Carroll

The Liverpool striker had a difficult first 18 months at Anfield but found his feet at the end of the season. England's best hope for goals in the absence of the suspended Wayne Rooney.

Jack Butland

The Birmingham City teenager was called into the squad at the last minute following an injury to John Ruddy.

Martin Kelly

The young Liverpool defender played in the pre-tournament friendly against Norway. His inclusion on the standby list sent a message that Hodgson will promote emerging talent in the 2014 World Cup qualifiers.

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The decline of Villarreal: from Champions League semi-finalists to the Spanish second division.

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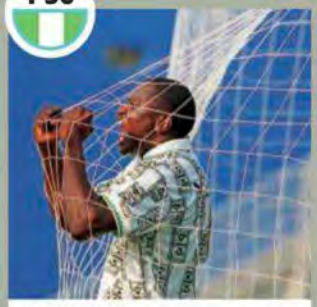

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Former African player of the year Rashidi Yekini dies in mysterious circumstances at the age of 48.

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Manchester City pip neighbours United in a dramatic finale to the Premier League season.

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Juventus are Serie A champions once again, but are there more dark clouds on the horizon?

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TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
Sepp Blatter welcomes Jeffrey Webb as he succeeds Jack Warner as CONCACAF president.

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ZIMBABWE
The authorities continue to drag their feet over punishing those involved in match fixing.

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GERMANY
Dortmund complete a domestic double as the balance of power swings away from Bayern Munich.

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TURKEY
While the country tries to choose between Olympic and Euro bids, Fenerbahce fans riot.

P40 **LIECHTENSTEIN**
After 14 years of Vaduz dominance, there is a new winner of the Liechtenstein Cup.

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SID LOWE
in Madrid

Sinking of the Yellow Submarine

Relegated Villarreal started the season in the Champions League

Six years ago Villarreal were a penalty away from the European Cup Final and they began this season in the Champions League. They will begin next season in the Spanish second division.

Barcelona, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, Napoli and Manchester City came to the Madrigal in 2011-2012. In 2012-13, the visitors will include Real Madrid and Barcelona once again, but this time it will be their B teams, and they will be joined by clubs such as Huesca, Sabadell and Guadalajara.

Villarreal were held up as a model club whose commitment to good football was steadfast, and whose economy was stable. Despite being runners-up in the league in 2008 and European Cup semi-finalists in 2006, they went down on the final day of the season.

Meanwhile, two teams in administration, Rayo Vallecano and Zaragoza, climbed above them to safety. The world had been turned upside down. No one saw this coming, least of all Villarreal - and that might just be one of the reasons why they found the trapdoor opening beneath them and failed to take evasive action.

Impressive academy

Villarreal always seemed to do things the right way. There was investment in the first team and in the youth set-up – an old orange grove had been bought and turned into one of the most impressive academies in the country. For a while Villarreal had as many players playing for Spain's youth teams from under-16 and down as Real Madrid or Barcelona.

Relegation seemed impossible. Although Villarreal had known there was a risk, in the end they appeared safe when it became clear that it would take two goals in the final two minutes in two different stadiums for them to go down. Incredibly, that's exactly what happened.

A draw would have been good enough to keep them up and even a defeat would do, so long as Rayo Vallecano did not beat Granada. Villarreal's opponents Atletico Madrid knew that Malaga were winning, meaning that they could not capture a Champions League place so, theoretically at least, they had nothing to play for. All Villarreal had to do was hold on. But in the 89th minute Radamel Falcao scored and then, 400km away, in the 91st minute, so did Raul Tamudo. Villarreal had gone from 0-0 to 1-0 down, Rayo had gone from 0-0 to 1-0 up. In the blink of an eye, Villarreal were suddenly, unexpectedly, down.

They had not been in the relegation zone for 19 games, but nor had they been far enough away from it.

"We have no one to blame but ourselves. We had the chance and we blew it," said skipper Marcos Senna.

Falcao had scored in the 89th minute; the week before, Valencia's Jonas scored against them in the 92nd. Then there was Carlos Vela's 87th-minute equaliser for Real Sociedad and Lautaro Acosta's 93rd-minute equaliser for Racing Santander. A few weeks prior to that, there were 85th, 92nd and 93rd minute goals against Levante and Zaragoza. Avoid any one of those and Villarreal would have survived.

There were broader problems too. Poor planning and poor luck have cost them. The financial crisis meant that Villarreal had to sell. At the start of the season Santi Cazorla went to Malaga, with whom he reached the Champions League again. Villarreal chose to sell Cazorla and keep Giuseppe Rossi, but losing Cazorla led team-mates to say that they felt like the team's soul had been removed. Senna said it was as if they had cut off a finger. Rossi, meanwhile, suffered a terrible knee-ligament injury and missed almost the whole campaign. Nilmar was also injured too often.

Villarreal made £15million on Cazorla and reinvested almost all of it, with £13.7m spent on Cristian Zapata, Javier Camunas and Jonathan De Guzman – none of whom performed consistently during the campaign.

They also went through three coaches: Juan Carlos Garrido, Jose Francisco Molina and Miguel Angel Lotina. That's three in a season for a club that had three in the previous seven years. The choices were poor too. Garrido's relationship with the players was dreadful, Molina never convinced and Lotina tried to protect his team from the danger with a defensive approach but ultimately exposed them even more.

When Falcao scored, club president Fernando Roig left his seat. At the end, he stood on the pitch and quietly applauded the fans. There was tension, but there was recognition too.

> Two goals in two minutes in two different grounds sent Villarreal down

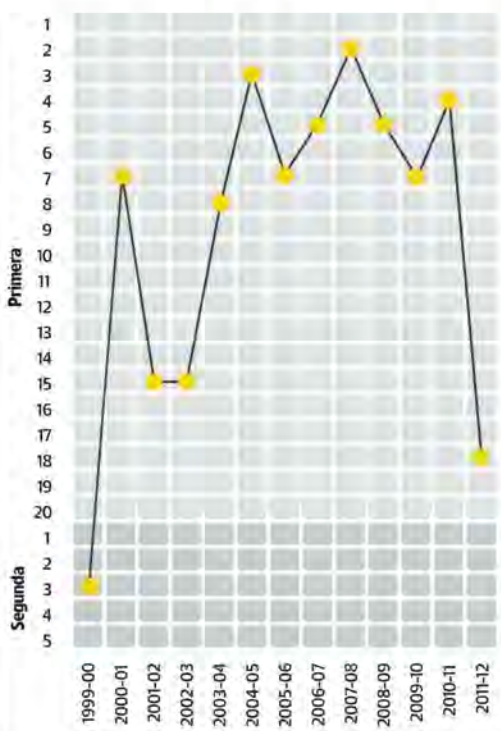
Villarreal – nicknamed the Yellow Submarine – had been a model for so long. Apart from Monaco, no smaller town has reached the semi-finals of the Champions League. There are only 40,000 people in Vila-real but they had consistently competed near the top of La Liga. Cold hard cash had been behind their miracle, at least to start with, but they had done it playing impressive, technical football.

In the final year they were just not what they had once been. They were tired, plodding, uninspiring, bloated and, frankly, boring. They showed startlingly little stomach for survival. They played with fire, again and again. And, eventually, they got burnt. Cruel? Sure. And yet it was nobody's fault but theirs. In the last eight years, Villarreal were the only "other" team to finish in the top two. Now they are gone.

While there were tears in Villarreal, elsewhere there were celebrations. Five teams had gone into the final day trying to avoid relegation, and it will be Sporting Gijon who join Villarreal and Racing Santander in the second division next term - the same Racing Santander whose owner, Ali Syed, announced his arrival by promising to make them Spain's third force.

THE RISE AND FALL OF VILLARREAL

Twelve years after promotion to the top flight, Villarreal find themselves back in the second division



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Rayo Vallecano, Granada and Zaragoza survived. There was a pitch invasion in Vallecas, where Rayo's last minute goal against Granada had seen them safe – and, because of Villarreal's defeat, their opponents Granada were safe too, causing both sets of fans to celebrate on the pitch together.

Less than 10 miles away, there were celebrations in Getafe. Zaragoza had been dead and buried, but were then dramatically resurrected. Their situation had got so bad that coach Manolo Jimenez told a press conference that he was "ashamed" of his team and his club. That week he had talked about departing, before eventually deciding against it because "only rats depart sinking ships". Zaragoza, he had admitted, were going down – but the least they could do is do it with dignity. "Let's not," he pleaded, "drag this shirt through the mud any more."

They did more than that. Despite a financial crisis and fans protesting against the owner, Agapito Iglesias, around 10,000 fans travelled to see them in Madrid on the final day. Victory against Getafe was their eighth win in 11 games. The Italian defender Maurizio Lanzaro had promised to shave off all his hair if they survived and his team-mates took the clippers to his head on the pitch. The next day Jimenez fulfilled his promise by dancing an Aragonese jota in front of the city's cathedral.

At the other end, Malaga reached the Champions League for the first time, finishing fourth behind Valencia after investing around £50m last summer.

They may have taken the slot that Villarreal occupied last year, but their fate, a year on, will not be the same. Not so very long ago, Villarreal broke up the Madrid-Barcelona duopoly. Maybe now it's Malaga's turn. **WS**

● *For league table, see page 111*

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
CRISTIANO RONALDO (Real Madrid)
Messi might have scored more, but a league winner's medal more than made up for a fantastic season. On 20 occasions he gave Madrid the lead in the league, while his goals dragged them back from a losing position four times.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
ISCO (Malaga)
The 20-year-old midfielder is the best player of his generation, says Malaga sporting director Antonio Fernandez.

COACH OF THE SEASON
JOSE MOURINHO (Real Madrid)
Real's first La Liga title in four years saw the Portuguese sign a new contract that ties him to the Bernabeu until 2016. He has now won league championships in Portugal, England, Italy and Spain.

Heartbreak...the harsh reality of relegation hits Villarreal striker Marco Ruben

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OSASU OBAYIUWANA
in Lagos

The Yekini mystery

Questions surround death of former African footballer of the year

When the death of Rashidi Yekini hit the headlines on the evening of Friday, May 4, 2012, it opened up a proverbial can of worms. How could the 1993 African footballer of the year, whose goalscoring record for Nigeria remains unequalled and who kept fit by religiously maintaining a daily training regime for 14 years after his international retirement, have inexplicably died at the age of 48?

It is a question to which Segun Odegbami, the former Nigeria captain who knew Yekini well and was one of the last people to see him alive, is demanding a proper answer – a feeling shared by many who are incredulous that an icon of the African game could perish in such mysterious circumstances.

"Yekini is an African football legend and a mentor of so many people," explains Odegbami. "He cannot just die like a nobody."

An iconic photograph of Yekini celebrating Nigeria's first-ever World Cup goal, at the 1994 finals against Hristo Stoichkov's Bulgaria, remains one of football's enduring memories.

One of the all-time top strikers at the African Nations Cup finals, Yekini scored 13 goals at the 1984, 1988, 1990, 1992 and 1994 editions. Only Laurent Pokou of the Ivory Coast and Cameroon's Samuel Eto'o, the four-time African footballer of the year, have bettered Yekini's tally.

"Ye-king", "Gangling" and "Goalsfather" were just a few of the nicknames that stuck to Yekini, who belonged to a select group of Africans to top the goalscoring charts in a major European league, as he did in the 1993-94 Portuguese season.

During his first stint with Vitoria Setubal – Jose Mourinho's hometown club – Yekini scored an amazing 90 goals in 108 appearances before going on to play for Olympiakos, Sporting Gijon and a host of other clubs in Switzerland, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, finally ending his career in Nigeria with Gateway in the 2005-06 season.

Iconic image...Yekini celebrates scoring for Nigeria against Bulgaria in the 1994 World Cup

But even at the height of his fame and scoring prowess, the Golden Boot winner at the 1994 African Nations Cup was a shy, reserved person who unashamedly revelled in his own company.

"Rashidi's life was completely wrapped around football," says Odegbami, Yekini's striking partner in the 1984 African Cup of Champions Clubs campaign. "The training ground was his world. On it, he came alive and shone like the mid-day sun. Outside it, he almost did not exist."

Early hardships

In a lengthy interview in September 2005, Yekini – who barely had a primary school education – told me about the hardships he experienced as a youngster growing up in Kaduna, northern Nigeria, after losing his father at an early age.

"I was sleeping in all kinds of places and had no idea about how I was going to survive," he revealed. "It was a very hard life and it made it hard to really put my trust in anyone."

Yekini's reclusive nature, shunning old team-mates, friends and even blood relatives, led many to speculate he was in deteriorating mental health. But Odegbami is quick to deny it, saying: "People have the impression he was insane. Rashidi was sane, healthy, fit and there was absolutely nothing wrong with him."

Approximately three weeks before his death, Yekini was forcibly removed from Ibadan, his south-western Nigerian home, by people said to be members of his extended family, who allegedly took him to an unknown location for medical treatment which seems to have gone horribly wrong.

As Baba Adisa Bolanta - the former police commissioner of Oyo State, home to the city of Ibadan - reveals, it was not the first time that an abduction attempt had been made; in mid-2010 he had stopped a previous effort.

"The family wanted to take him for treatment, but Rashidi told me he was unwilling to go with them," says Bolanta. "I made it clear that he was not to be forced out of his home without the right medical advice and help. The family entered into an undertaking not to make a further attempt to abduct him and that was how it ended at that time."

Mohammed Olanrewaju, Yekini's lawyer for several years, testified to Bolanta's account.

But the police's latest decision not to open an investigation into the mystery of how one of Africa's most famous footballers died has shocked Olanrewaju, who says: "How can the police claim that they cannot look into Rashidi's death because they have received no formal complaint?

"We are waiting for the release of the death certificate, which is supposed to indicate the factors leading to Rashidi's death. That will certainly be the starting point for finding out what really happened."

Considering all that Yekini achieved in the African game, unravelling the unvarnished truth of his demise is the very least Nigeria owes him. WS

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GAVIN HAMILTON
in London

Manchester's thrilling finale

City beat United to title on dramatic last day

Unbelievable...Aguero steals the Premier League title with his late goal against QPR

The climax to the Premier League season, which saw Manchester City snatch the title in the final seconds of the final match, prompted many observers to hail the 2011-12 season as the most exciting of all time.

Certainly, Premier League marketing chiefs were handed valuable ammunition in their attempts to extract a best price for a new TV deal, both at home and overseas. But there is a striking case to be argued for the campaign to be considered a mediocre affair played by average teams, with a series of freak results involving the top-five teams suggesting more weaknesses than strengths among the elite.

As far back as August, Tottenham Hotspur were beaten 5-1 by Manchester City, while Manchester United thrashed Arsenal 8-2. Arsenal rallied to beat Tottenham 5-2 at home and Chelsea 5-3 away, while City exorcised many demons with a 6-1 victory away to neighbours United.

> There is a case for the campaign to be considered a mediocre affair played by average teams

City, for all their multimillion-pound investment from Abu Dhabi, still needed leadership from manager Roberto Mancini, who handled difficult situations with strikers Carlos Tevez and Mario Balotelli. He deserved the plaudits for City's first title in 44 years, achieved when Sergio Aguero scored against 10-man Queens Park Rangers in the dieing seconds of the season.

The goal shattered United's hopes of snatching the title back from City. They had won at Sunderland that same day, but knew the fate of the title was out of their hands after City had won the decisive derby game at the City of Manchester Stadium a few weeks earlier.

In truth, United did well to challenge City for so much of the campaign. Their current collection of players is a shadow of former squads – so much so that 37-year-old Paul Scholes had to be recalled from retirement to shore up the midfield.

Strong finish

Arsenal, after a dreadful start which prompted widespread calls for manager Arsene Wenger's departure, recovered to finish strongly. Robin Van Persie was their outstanding performer, while Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain was an exciting addition. North London rivals Tottenham spluttered out of the race for Champions League places when Harry Redknapp was linked with the England job following Fabio Capello's resignation. The points dropped in March and April proved costly when Chelsea's Champions League victory in Munich shunted them into next season's Europa League.

Newcastle United were the revelation of the season, just missing out on a Champions League place. They were well prepared by Alan Pardew, who quickly bedded in clever close-season signings from France and Germany.

Liverpool's eighth place was poor by the high standards demanded by their fans. Kenny Dalglish, a sentimental appointment 18 months ago, departed after winning the League Cup but failing to beat Chelsea in the FA Cup Final.

All three promoted teams stayed up, though QPR by the skin of their teeth and in spite of Joey Barton's serial indiscretions. Both Swansea City and Norwich City played their way into 11th and 12th place respectively by playing in a positive style.

Blackburn Rovers, under the disastrous stewardship of Venkys, were relegated with Bolton Wanderers and Wolverhampton Wanderers. Reading, Southampton and, via a play-off victory over Blackpool, West Ham United, will replace them next season. WS

● *For league table, see page 106*

Steady hand...Pardew

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
ROBIN VAN PERSIE (Arsenal)
The Dutch striker finished as the league's top scorer with 30 goals and collected awards from football writers and his fellow pros.

COACH OF THE SEASON
ALAN PARDEW (Newcastle United)
Steered a team tipped by many to be relegation battlers into Europe.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
ALEX OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN (Arsenal)
The teenage winger played his way into Roy Hodgson's England squad for the Euros.

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PADDY AGNEW
in Rome

Unbeaten Juve are back on top

But a match-fixing cloud looms over coach Conte

The "Old Lady" is back on top in Italian football. Although Milan pushed them hard, in the end there was a sense of inevitability that Juventus would go on to lift a 28th – 30th according to them – Serie A title. They clinched it on the second last weekend of the season, eventually finishing the year unbeaten in the league and four points clear of second-place Milan.

It has been said that the combination of Juventus hunger, Antonio Conte's coaching and imperious playmaking from Andrea Pirlo made Juve the logical favourite this season. On top of that, the Turin outfit brought two key advantages to the table: namely, the galvanising effect of their brand new, state-of-the-art stadium and the fact that they were not involved in European competition.

In the end, that latter advantage may well have tipped the scales. It was certainly no coincidence that Milan were knocked off the top of the table just three days after they had been dumped out of the Champions League by Barcelona. Prior to their 2-1 home defeat by Fiorentina, Milan had topped the league for the past two months.

However, that defeat cost the *Rossoneri* heavily and allowed Juventus to climb back on top of the table, a position they had held from early last October until early February. It was telling, too, that Juventus finally and definitively wrapped up the title one week ahead of time when an exhausted Milan were hustled out of the second derby of the season, beaten 4-2 by Internazionale. Juventus, who had begun the day just a point ahead took advantage, easing to a 2-0 victory away at Cagliari

But this still leaves one key question: was this Juve's 28th title, as all the football annuals will record, or was it their 30th? The polemical point in question here is that Juventus boss Andrea Agnelli still wants two titles "restored" to the club, namely the 2005 and 2006 titles that they were stripped of as punishment for their heavy involvement in the Calciopoli match-fixing scandal of 2006. While the club has never defended their then-managing director Luciano Moggi, who was subsequently banned from football for life, they still claim that they won both those titles fair and square on the pitch.

Champion...Juve coach Antonio Conte

This is an argument that, clearly, will never end. However, Juventus have upped the stakes by insisting on the right to include three "stars" on some part of the logo on club shirts next season. Each star represents 10 title wins, so three obviously represents 30 titles.

Given that the use of the star has little to do with the rules and regulations of Italian football, and is more a matter of custom and practise, the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) may well turn a blind eye to whatever inventive logo Juventus create for next season.

Others, however, have not failed to notice the Juventus provocation. Zdenek Zeman, the original whistle-blower in the 2002-2007 "Processo Juve", in which the club was accused of systematic doping practices, certainly noticed. Zeman, who has just guided Pescara to Serie A promotion, commented: "Is it their 28th or their 30th title? For me, frankly, they are entitled to 22, at the very most 23."

Joy...Juventus clinch the Seria A title

> Juventus boss Andrea Agnelli still wants the 2005 and 2006 titles "restored" to the club

Another rather more significant observation came from FIFA president Sepp Blatter, who sent a message of congratulations to the club, complimenting Juventus on their "28th title win". Lest Juventus failed to get the point, Blatter added that this was a great triumph which "after nine years" sees Juventus once again on top in Italy. Nine years means the 2002-2003 season, the last time according to the FIGC that Juventus were Italian champions. The

THE INVINCIBLES

In Europe's big five of England, France, Germany Italy and Spain, only seven teams have gone an entire league campaign without losing a game.

		P	W	D	L
PRESTON NE	(1888-89)	22	18	4	0
ATHLETIC BILBAO	(1929-30)	18	12	6	0
REAL MADRID	(1931-32)	18	10	8	0
PERUGIA*	(1978-79)	30	11	19	0
MILAN	(1991-92)	34	22	12	0
ARSENAL	(2003-04)	38	26	12	0
JUVENTUS	(2011-12)	38	23	15	0

* everyone won their domestic championship except Perugia, who finished second

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Blatter point is clear.

What is also clear is that Juventus, this season at least, were truly deserving champions. A 3-1 win over Atalanta on the final day of the season saw them go unbeaten throughout the league campaign, helped in no small measure by the best defence in Serie A. Their season did end on an anti-climax, however, when they were beaten 2-0 by Napoli in the Italian Cup Final in Rome.

That defeat in no way diminishes an excellent Juventus season; if anything, it represented fitting reward for an excellent season for Napoli who were lifting their first trophy since the Diego Maradona days, 22 years earlier.

Bright sparks

Napoli provided one of the few bright moments for Italian clubs in the Champions League this season, getting through to the knockout stages at the expense of big-spending Manchester City. Just like Milan, they paid a price for a Champions League run which came to an end with a 4-1 extra-time defeat by eventual champions, Chelsea. Napoli lost a bit of momentum in Serie A after that, ending the season in fifth place, out of the Champions League but at least good enough for a Europa League spot.

The club's failure to qualify for the Champions League was disappointing, given the team's potential. Indeed, as things stand, it looks as though Italy will have only two serious challengers in next season's Champions League, namely Juventus and Milan. The third Italian qualifier, Udinese, good footballing side though they are, hardly seem equipped to make much impact.

Hot shot...Destro

The other Serie A verdicts saw Lazio and Internazionale qualify for the Europa League, while Cesena, Novara and Lecce were relegated. Torino, Pescara and the winners of the Serie B promotion play-off Final will replace them.

It would not be Italy if the season ended without some controversy and this year was no exception. In mid-May, the Italian federation's chief prosecutor, Stefano Palazzi, filed match-fixing charges relating to 33 matches over the last two seasons, involving 22 mainly lower-division clubs and 51 players. Three Serie A clubs – Atalanta, Novara and Siena – have also been summonsed.

This latest showcase sports trial, due to go on until June, follows on from last summer's "Last Bet" investigation in Cremona. That state attorney's investigation has already prompted the FIGC to dock Atalanta six points in Serie A this season, as well as issue a three-year ban to Atalanta midfielder Cristiano Doni and a five-year ban to former Lazio striker Giuseppe Signori.

The "Last Bet" betting-related trial is worrying, not only because of the numbers involved but also because it may yet still involve Juventus coach Antonio Conte. Former Siena player Filippo Carobbio claims that Conte was party to two fixed, end-of-season games last year when he coached Siena to a Serie A promotion.

The news that Conte may be involved was enough to spark speculation that Juve had already contacted their former coach, ex-England manager, Fabio Capello with a view to him taking over should Conte pick up a ban. **WS**

● *For league table, see page 108*

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
ANDREA PIRLO (Juventus)
The playmaker supreme was arguably the champions' single most important player. The folks up at Juve still cannot believe how Milan let him go last summer. Up at Milan, they don't know either.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
MATTIA DESTRO (Siena)
Twelve goals for the relegation battlers in his first Serie A season earned the 21-year-old a deserved call-up to national coach Cesare Prandelli's provisional 32-man pool of players ahead of the Euro 2012 squad announcement.

COACH OF THE SEASON
ZDENEK ZEMAN (Pescara)
The Czech took Pescara back up to Serie A, playing some pretty sharp football along the way.

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LASANA LIBURD
in Port of Spain

Jeffrey who?

New CONCACAF president Webb is Zurich's man in the Caribbean

United...Webb (right) with Blatter

New CONCACAF president Jeffrey Webb, a 47-year-old banker from the Cayman Islands, started his tenure as head of the third largest of FIFA's six confederations with an elegantly delivered and uplifting speech at the Boscolo Hotel in Budapest, Hungary.

"What has our focus been? Politics and economics; let us focus on our game," said Webb, before adding: "We must move the clouds and allow the sunshine in."

There was a standing ovation as Webb, who replaced the controversial Jack Warner, left the podium.

Before the freshly minted FIFA vice-president found his seat, though, the smiling faces at the Boscolo were already discussing his job security.

"We should take the focus away from politics and economics?" one insider asked rhetorically. "What nonsense; football is politics and economics."

FIFA president Sepp Blatter, who was a guest at the CONCACAF congress, seemed pleased enough by Webb's debut and was effusive in his praise.

"The credibility of CONCACAF is back," said Blatter, who played a key role in Webb's sudden emergence.

The Cayman Islands rarely earns a mention even at Caribbean Football Union (CFU) level and, after 21 years at the helm of his island's FA, no one had ever asked Webb to sit on the CFU executive. And, despite his flowery speech, his peers remain unconvinced by his credentials as a football administrator.

> Despite his lecture on morals in Budapest, Webb could not have been blind to past indiscretions

The banker seems to have done better for himself on FIFA's internal audit committee, on which he served as deputy chairman for the past nine years.

It is a good vantage from which to make powerful friends and, as Warner spontaneously combusted after a bribery scandal that led to his and Mohamed Bin Hammam's expulsion, word went around the islands that they were meant to support Webb.

The CFU had been particularly open to suggestions from Zurich for much of the past 12 months as delegates jetted regularly between the Caribbean and FIFA's Swiss headquarters for disciplinary hearings in the wake of the Bin Hammam scandal. But the dust has now settled and a few of CONCACAF's 25 Caribbean associations are wondering if the obscure, mild-mannered banker suits them.

A day before Webb ascended unopposed to the CONCACAF throne, the more boisterous 43-year-old Antigua & Barbuda FA general-secretary Gordon Derrick fought his way to the CFU presidency, ahead of Cuban delegate Luis Hernandez, Trinidad & Tobago's Harold Taylor and Ronald Jones from Barbados.

Derrick is now the most influential figure in a confederation that boasts 35 members. However, there is little enthusiasm elsewhere. The likes of Mexico, Costa Rica, Canada and the United States have grown weary of life under the rule of tiny Caribbean nations whose own international and domestic teams are of dubious merit.

Confirmation that Warner spirited away from the CFU a US$22.5million asset, the Joao Havelange Centre of Excellence in Trinidad, and allegedly used it to mortgage funds for his domestic political aspirations, will not sit well with North and Central America.

Now FIFA aims to regain control of its confederation while also offering a picture of stability. And the tall, elegant Webb fits its bill. Yet Webb could not have been blind to past indiscretions despite his lecture on morals in Budapest and the warm applause.

Derrick, the new Caribbean czar, was reprimanded and fined by FIFA last year for accepting a bribe from Bin Hammam and then attempting to deceive investigators about it. WS

IT'S ALL THERE IN BLACK AND WHITE

Who owns the centre?

Lasana Liburd has exposed how the Joao Havelange Centre of Excellence belongs to Jack Warner three times over. The document (below right) shows ownership is split between himself and two of his companies, CCAM and Company and Renraw (Warner backwards) Investments Ltd. His wife, Maureen, is the only other director at both companies.

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MARK GLEESON

Authorities still dragging their feet

ZIFA shows no sign of getting to bottom of match-fixing issues

It has been more than two years since the first revelations of match-fixing involving the Zimbabwe national team surfaced – and still not a single player or official has been punished, despite a lengthy investigation and even some confessions.

There has been an internal enquiry, hours of evidence collected and, crucially, admissions made by players involved, yet the matter creeps along with little evidence of any willingness to rid the game of the rotten apples and resolve the issue. The only sanction so far has been to ban some 90 players from playing for the national team and the suspension of national coach Norman Mapeza from his post.

In October last year a retired judge, Abdul Ibrahim, was called up to get to the bottom of each individual case, but all he has done to date is exonerate 33 players – conveniently in time for them to be available again for Zimbabwe at the start of the 2014 World Cup qualifying campaign.

Ibrahim claims he has been unable to speak to many of those involved in the 15 Zimbabwe games that are under suspicion – matches that were played during tours to south-east Asia between 2007 and 2009 – because they are foreign-based. However, most are plying their trade in neighbouring South Africa and would be easy to find for a formal series of questions.

This pedestrian approach is surprising given Ibrahim's credentials for cleaning up dirt in sport. He is a former test match cricket official who dealt with a previous case in Kenya where a cricketer was banned for five years after being found guilty of match-fixing.

FIFA's role has been benign. Jerome Valcke, general-secretary of world football's controlling body, did not even know about the case when reporters asked for his comment on the scandal at the Confederation of African Football congress in Khartoum in February 2011. He promised to get right onto the matter but it seemed to slip quickly down his list of priorities. FIFA's former security chief, Chris Eaton, has only been to Harare once personally, and he sent a deputy on another occasion.

Key figure...Rushwaya (centre)

> Players who have admitted taking money to throw matches still play on

Playing on

FIFA has turned off the funding tap to Zimbabwe until it resolves the issue and deals with the guilty, but there has been no pressure to move the process along. Therefore, players who have admitted taking money to throw matches still play on, many of them earning good salaries in South Africa's Premier League.

Ultimately it is the Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA) who will deliver the sanctions – which FIFA will then extend worldwide – and they have mandated Ibrahim to pronounce on individual guilt or innocence.

ZIFA is torn between those committee members keen to clean up the game and those who have something to hide. There is also no appetite at government level for a proper investigation in a country where corruption is now endemic because of the economic woes of the last decade. ZIFA's former general-secretary, Henrietta Rushwaya, was arrested by Zimbabwe police, but six of the seven charges have since been dropped after the prosecution failed to gather the necessary evidence.

Players are alleged to have been paid between US$1,500 and US$2,000 to lose matches, while the technical team allegedly got between US$7,000 and US$9,000 for the tour games, specifically organised to set up betting opportunities for the syndicate involved. The money came from Wilson Perumal, the Singapore swindler now in jail in Finland on similar charges. WS

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NICK BIDWELL
in Munich

Dortmund at the double

Victory confirms the shifting balance of power in the Bundesliga

"Even though Bayern have the better individual players, it's Dortmund who have the better team." All-time German midfield great Lothar Matthaus might not be universally popular in his homeland – too cocksure and with a messy private life made-to-measure for the tabloid press – but he was talking succinct sense when called upon to explain Borussia Dortmund's current domestic hegemony.

Whereas the economically-dominant Bayern spent the vast bulk of the Bundesliga season relying on lightning bolts of inspiration from wide-men Franck Ribery and Arjen Robben and striker supreme Mario Gomez, the utter irresistibility of the Dortmunder was their unrelenting, unyielding team ethic. A first-ever double was delivered with an "all-for-one and one-for all" approach allied to a whirlwind pressing game, perpetual movement and high-octane switches from defence to attack.

Everyone knows how Dortmund play, everyone knows their methods rarely change, but no one has yet been able to break the code so masterfully devised by ever-impressive coach Jurgen Klopp.

Despite a laborious start to the season - they lost three of their first six games and were mid-table in September - Klopp's side soon slipped into all-conquering mode. Not only did they go undefeated in their final 26 league games, they also registered a record number of Bundesliga points with their total of 81.

From autumn onwards, everything the Dortmunder did had panache, dynamism, energy and enthusiasm sprinkled all over it. And to complete the perfect picture they kept it clean too, finishing top of the fair-play charts with just 33 yellow cards and two reds. Dortmund did not simply outrun, outmanoeuvre and outscore the rest, they were better behaved as well.

Klopp deserves the utmost praise for assembling such an attractive and efficient winning machine. A team principally made up of raw colts – average age 24.2 years – needs a sensitive guiding hand and Klopp has proved to be the Westfalenstadion horse whisperer: part-unpretentious professor, part-confidant, part-visionary. With the greatest of care, he has turned a group of starry-eyed kids into a formidable collective, an attacking football steamroller fuelled with voracious ambition and no little fun.

Borussia's end-of-season awards should include the following:

• Marksman of the year – Polish striker Robert Lewandowski for his 22 Bundesliga goals and a spectacular return to form after a so-so first season at the Ruhr outfit.

• Clubman of the year – veteran captain and defensive midfielder Sebastian Kehl, who at long last has enjoyed an injury-free season.

• Livewire of the year – Japanese midfielder Shinji Kagawa for his non-stop activity and goalscoring.

• Most improved player of the year – Jakub Blaszczykowski, coming good after years of inconsistency.

• Most reliable player of the year – defender Mats Hummels...yet again.

Asked recently if the balance of footballing power in Germany had shifted from Bayern to Dortmund, Ottmar Hitzfeld – a man who brought considerable success to both clubs – agreed that it had. And it seems a logical conclusion to draw. In each of their last four league encounters with Bayern, Dortmund have come out on top and in the German Cup Final, in Berlin, the gap separating the pair looked canyon-like as Dortmund strolled to a 5-2 victory.

For all their Champions League heroics this term, Bayern's leaders are only too aware that they cannot go on like this. Second place in the league, a full eight points behind Dortmund, is no man's land as far as the Bayern boardroom is concerned and immediate corrections will be demanded, notably to rectify their lack of defensive rigour, creative subtlety and squad depth.

> Klopp turned a group of starry-eyed kids into a formidable collective

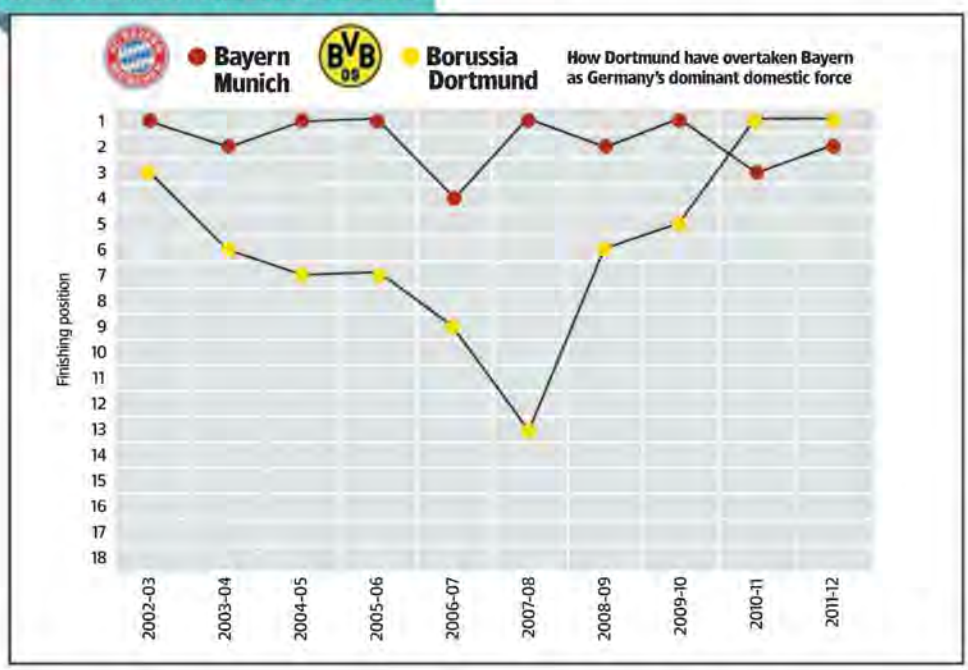
Yes, they were terribly unlucky to have midfield strategist Bastian Schweinsteiger sidelined by injury for most of the second half of the season, but it was not the only reason they failed to go the distance.

Steadying the ship

One constant theme throughout the season were the against-the-odds successes. Brought back last autumn for a second spell as Schalke boss following the nervous exhaustion-induced resignation of Ralf Rangnick, uncompromising Dutch coach Huub Stevens did so well in steadying the ship that his side clinched third place and a direct pass to the Champions League.

At Borussia Monchengladbach, master tactician Lucien Favre worked a miracle in transforming a unit seen as relegation fodder into a mightily impressive top-four team. Gladbach face a Champions League eliminator in August, but will have to cope without last term's star attacking turn Marco

BUNDESLIGA: THE LAST DECADE



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Double...Bundesliga winners Dortmund lift the German Cup

Reus, who has decamped to Dortmund.

Newly promoted Augsburg confounded all the naysayers who thought they were certainties for relegation, while Freiburg staged an equally stunning post-Christmas fightback, going from bottom of the pile to comfortable survivors despite top scorer Papiss Cisse moving to Newcastle United in January and coach Marcus Sorg declared surplus to requirements. Much of their success was down to new boss Christian Streich completely redesigning the back-line to pull them away from the precipice.

Former Bundesliga champions Cologne and Kaiserslautern fell out of the top flight without a whimper, as did Hertha Berlin, who a few days after dodging the direct demotion bullet lost out to Fortuna Dusseldorf in the relegation/promotion play-off.

Hertha's last throw of the dice had been the late, late appointment of golden oldie coach Otto Rehhagel. Sadly for the capital city club, the gamble was not to pay off and Jos Luhukay, the man who kept Augsburg up in their debut Bundesliga campaign, has now been tasked with ensuring a quick return.

Joining Dusseldorf in the top flight next season will be Greuther Furth - who have never competed in the Bundesliga before - and Eintracht Frankfurt.

There was much competition this term for the tag of top-flight underachievers, with Hoffenheim, Werder Bremen, Wolfsburg and a stuttering Bayer Leverkusen all falling considerably short of expectations.

However, no team looked as wretched as Hamburg. Once a powerhouse of the game, they are now the epitome of mismanagement and disillusion. **WS**

● *For league table, see page 107*

Team player...Huntelaar

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
KLAAS-JAN HUNTELAAR (Schalke)
The Bundesliga's leading scorer, the Dutch striker tends to be pigeon-holed as a penalty-box predator and nothing more, but he proved himself to be a fine team player, adding 13 assists to his 29 goals.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
MARC-ANDRE TER STEGEN
(Borussia Monchengladbach)
Outstanding teenage goalkeeper who in the course of 12 impressive months went from youth-team football to national prominence. With Gladbach since the age of four, his most obvious asset is his coolness under pressure.

COACH OF THE SEASON
JURGEN KLOPP (Borussia Dortmund)
In his fourth year on the Dortmund bridge, "Kloppo" further enhanced his reputation as one of European football's brightest young bosses this season. The 44-year-old is the complete package, mixing training-ground expertise, match-day bravery, analytical ability, psychological skills and great PR.

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KEIR RADNEDGE
in Istanbul

Bidding wars

Euro 2020 bid faces Olympic obstacle and match-fixing tension

Galatasaray won the championship at the expense of Fenerbahce, who carried off the Turkish Cup in a febrile context with tensions running high over the long-running match-fixing trial, along with angry stalemates between Fenerbahce, Besiktas and UEFA.

Further confusion stemmed from the backdrop which saw Turkey emerge as favourites to host Euro 2020, with UEFA hoping to delay a decision as long as possible to allow the Turks to negotiate a path through their domestic minefields.

Turkish sport is caught on the horns of a dilemma between not only the Euro 2020 bid – Turkey lost out to France by only one vote for 2016 – but its attempt to bring the Olympic Games to Istanbul in the same summer.

UEFA and the International Olympic Committee are agreed that Turkey cannot hope to have both; the issue is whether the Turks will decide to bid between one or the other, or whether they can campaign coherently for both simultaneously.

In the domestic league, veteran coach Fatih Terim guided Galatasaray to the top of the "regular" table, nine points clear of title-holders Fenerbahce. And when they then dropped seven points in three home games in the play-offs, Fenerbahce could not take advantage.

The season reached a climax with Fenerbahce, unbeaten at home in 18 months, at home to Galatasaray. Fener had to win, while Gala needed only a draw – which they achieved. Euro 2012 referee Cuneyt Cakir sent off a player from each side in a 0-0 stalemate which ended in chaos.

At the final whistle hundreds of Fenerbahce fans, upset at what they considered a deliberate plot against their club, stormed the pitch. Flares and plastic seats were thrown at police, who responded with pepper spray. One fan was stabbed and dozens were hurt and/or arrested

Rioters outside the stadium overturned two police vehicles, smashed shop windows and stoned a water cannon. Sensibly, the Turkish federation had banned Galatasaray fans from attending. More clashes erupted between Fener and Gala fans in the centre of Istanbul and other cities.

Galatasaray, champions for the 18th time, had earned it. Uruguayan goalkeeper Fernando Muslera kept a club record 19 clean sheets, while midfield anchor Selcuk Inan justified his signing from Trabzonspor last year by contributing 13 goals and 11 assists.

> The Turkish FA and National Olympic Committee both claim government backing

Fenerbahce's consolation was to win the cup for the first time since 1983, seeing off Bursaspor 4-0 in the Final. Brazilian schemer Alex set up two goals for Caner Erkin and one for Semih Senturk before rounding things off by scoring the fourth himself.

Who competes in Europe next season is still open to question. Galatasaray will go into the Champions League, but whether Fenerbahce, still disputing match-fixing suspicions, will be allowed to take up their place in the third qualifying round remains in doubt.

Trabzonspor, who finished third, have qualified for the Europa League and so, theoretically, did fourth-placed Besiktas and cup runners-up Bursaspor. However, after the season had ended, both Besiktas and Bursaspor were suspended from European competition for one year each and fined by the European federation for breaching financial fairplay regulations. Besiktas president Fikret Orman says he will appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, while exclusion would be good news for Eskisehirspor and Istanbul BB, who finished fifth and sixth respectively.

Ankaragucu, Manisaspor and Samsunspor were relegated with their places in the Turkish Super League next season going to Akhisar Belediyespor, Elazigspor and Kasımpasa.

Meanwhile, both the Turkish Football Federation and the National Olympic Committee claim full government backing for their respective Euro and Olympic bids for 2020.

The IOC decides between Istanbul, Madrid and Tokyo for its summer Games in September 2013. If the Turks lose they can still hope for the Euros since UEFA will not make up its own mind until early 2014. UEFA president Michel Platini has promised publicly to back Turkey if it fails on the Olympic stage.

This is assuming that the match-fixing crisis has been resolved by then.

Fenerbahce's jailed president Aziz Yildirim is among the defendants in a long-running trial focusing on allegations concerning 22 matches in the 2010-11 season. Simultaneously, the TFF has ruled that the clubs originally accused under its own code of ethics have no case to answer. WS

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
SELCUK INAN (Galatasaray)
Signed from Trabzonspor last summer, the midfielder's ability to switch from defence to attack and back again was vital and he missed only one Super League match all season.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
SONER AYDOGDU (Genclerbirligi)
The 21-year-old central midfielder was capped for the first time in February's friendly against Slovakia and is wanted by all the country's top clubs.

COACH OF THE SEASON
FATIH TERIM (Galatasaray)
Won his fifth league championship in charge of Gala.

All over...Fenerbahce fans riot after their side lost the final game of the season at home to Galatasaray

● *For league table, see page 111*

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STEVE MENARY
in Vaduz

USV end Vaduz's cup dominance

The country's only full-time club loses 14-year hold on cup

A penalty shoot-out triumph for USV Eschen Mauren in this year's Liechtenstein Cup Final not only denied Vaduz a 15th win in a row, it also underlined the problems that face the game in the tiny Alpine principality.

On a dog of a night at the Rheinpark Stadion, USV made all the early running without testing the experienced Vaduz and Liechtenstein keeper Peter Jehle. Then, minutes before half-time, USV gave away a penalty that Vaduz's Swiss midfielder Pascal Cerrone hit confidently passed Ben Buchel. Vaduz extended their lead in the second half through the Austrian midfielder Mario Sara, but USV replied through Igor Manojlovic.

Eren Dulundu then sent the game into extra time with a last-gasp equaliser. With neither side able to make any further headway in teeming rain, the game went to penalties.

Franz Burgmeier, Vaduz's veteran left-sided player, took the first penalty but Buchel saved. When Vaduz's ineffective Argentinian striker Mariano Tripodi missed another, the trophy was all but lost and Manojlovic stepped up to score the winning penalty, much to the elation of the hundreds of noisy USV fans in the crowd.

Final eliminator...USV (in white) and Vaduz battle it out for Liechtenstein's sole place in Europe

USV had only won the cup four times since it was first held in 1946, with their last victory a quarter of a century ago. In contrast, Vaduz – Liechtenstein's only full-time professional club – had lost a trophy they had won 40 times previously and also the only place in Europe available to teams from a country which has just seven senior clubs.

All seven sides play in various levels of the Swiss league. With no league structure of its own, Liechtenstein can't enter a side in the Champions League and so the cup winners take a place in the qualifiers for the Europa League.

Triesenberg are the only one of the seven clubs never to have won the Liechtenstein Cup, but there are big differences between the teams. Mathias Voigt, who was elected president of the Liechtensteiner Fussballverband (LFV) earlier this year, says there is no appetite among the clubs for any kind of league.

For Voight, USV's shock win will make little or no difference to his strategy on taking office. He says: "Most of the clubs have a local and civic duty and we cannot build a league from seven clubs as the quality would not be very interesting."

That is why Liechtenstein is likely to remain the only country in Europe without a national league. But even if there was one, it would be unlikely to help veteran national coach Hans-Peter "Bidu" Zaugg.

Last season Liechtenstein did not have enough players to run an under-19 team. However, before taking charge of the national side Zaugg worked with Liechtenstein's youth teams, and a group of boys he first coached at under-15 level are beginning to break into the national team. The difficulty now facing these youngsters is getting a regular start at club level.

Needing to play

"I don't have enough players in Vaduz," says Zaugg. "That is my biggest problem. Also, Vaduz have only a first team. I ask them to have an under-21 team but no. So if a player from Liechtenstein goes to Vaduz and does not get into the first team, they can do nothing but train. It is clear to me that young players have to play, it is not enough to just train. They must play."

Even if Vaduz did set up a reserve side, this would not go down well with other clubs, who would face losing players that wanted to take a chance on winning a full-time contract at the

WHERE IN THE WORLD

Liechtenstein is a tiny principality in central Europe, sandwiched between Austria and Switzerland.

Population 36,713
Size 62 sq m **Capital** Vaduz
Language German
Religion Roman Catholic

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professional outfit.

Manojlovic is a Serb and Sara is Austrian, but most of USV's cup-winning side are local. However, just eight of Vaduz's 25-man squad last season were Liechtensteiners. The club's Dutch coach Eric Orie is caught between wanting to help locals and putting out a team capable of mounting a challenge for a return to the Swiss Super League.

"The big clubs in Switzerland have better players and more money," says Orie. "We try to put in Liechtenstein players like Franz and Peter Jehle, who has played professionally in Portugal with Boavista, but there is no pressure."

In the Cup Final, the experienced Burgmeier, who has played in the Swiss top flight and the English league, was left on the bench. A phlegmatic Burgmeier says: "It's limited in our country and we are lucky to have a professional club, to be able to train full time and play professionally without leaving home.

"If we play just Liechtenstein players, I think the level for Vaduz would be the Challenge League, as we are now, and not the Super League. For the national coach it's his dream if everyone is playing here at Vaduz, but it's difficult."

Vaduz won promotion to the Swiss top flight in 2008 and spent a season taking on the biggest clubs in Switzerland, such as Basle, Grasshoppers, Lucerne and Zurich.

They were relegated after a year and remain in the second-tier Challenge League. The next two most senior clubs from Liechtenstein are USV and Balzers, who play at the third level. These sides are both semi-professional and, apart from derby games, rarely draw four-figure crowds.

Vaduz are the peak of a pyramid in the Liechtenstein club game but even their crowds at the Rheinpark only averaged 1,500 last term.

Ticket prices for a Vaduz home game are usually 20 Swiss francs. Prices were halved for the Cup Final but, with the game staged on the eve of a two-day bank holiday and the same night as the Swiss Cup Final, the attendance was poor. Most of the noise came from the USV fans, who recognise that their team's victory also represented a kind of triumph for all Liechtenstein's players.

Next season, USV will play in Europe for the first time. Like all footballing ambitions in Liechtenstein, the ambitions of USV coach Uwe Wegmann will be limited and are unlikely to stretch past winning a couple of rounds at best. But for Liechtenstein's footballers, a part-time contract at USV might now seem more appealing. **WS**

Victorious...jubilant USV players celebrate their shock cup win

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The miracle of Munich

Chelsea, without key players and facing Bayern Munich at their home ground, defied all the odds to win their first European Cup in a thrilling final. Keir Radnedge reports from Munich

Time and again football manages, somehow, to astound even those who have been immersed in the game for all their professional lives. Chelsea's victory in Munich was one such occasion.

This was not a great game. No memorable football, as such. But it generated matchless drama and a series of twists and turns which demonstrated just why so many millions around the world are held spellbound by the game.

Chelsea's victory made for mesmerising "reality television" far beyond the scripted manipulations of any TV producer or director.

The "Roman Empire" from west London appeared doomed to defeat time and time again. First, Thomas Muller headed Bayern in front in the 83rd minute, only for Didier Drogba to head a magnificent equaliser five minutes later. Then, in extra time, they conceded a penalty, only for Petr Cech to save from Arjen Robben. Later still, Juan Mata missed Chelsea's first kick in the shoot-out and they trailed 3-1 before Bayern missed twice to give the Londoners a 4-3 win.

Drogba, having headed the equaliser and conceded the extra-time penalty with his trip on Franck Ribery, converted the decisive, last spot-kick. He was named the official man of the match, providing a story-book finale to the 34-year-old's last game for the club.

Chelsea's triumph was depressing for others quite apart from Bayern.

Tottenham Hotspur, for one. Chelsea will return to the Champions League next season as holders, thus snatching the last Premier League slot from fourth-finishing Spurs who drop into the Europa League. Anderlecht are another, as they dropped out of the group stage and into the third qualifying round next season – four more matches and maybe an early exit and far less money.

> Chelsea's victory made for mesmerising "reality television"

Finally, there was UEFA president Michel Platini. His concept of financial fairplay took a battering as an oligarch-enriched club triumphed over one that prides itself on the virtues of financial probity. To rub it in, Chelsea's mega-rich owner Roman Abramovich, beaming broadly, even joined his players briefly for the trophy presentation.

Bayern had only themselves to blame for playing, ultimately, the role of fall guys in the most remarkable match in the history of Chelsea Football Club. They had virtually all the possession and pressure, yet it was Chelsea who ended up winning the Champions League for the first time, fulfilling the dream that had prompted Abramovich to buy the club, back in 2003, in the first place.

Match winner...Drogba plays to the cameras

Making amends

Both clubs had painful recent memories to exorcise. Bayern had lost 2-0 to Internazionale in the 2010 Final in Madrid, while Chelsea had been pipped on penalties in Moscow by Manchester United two years earlier.

At least Chelsea already had something in their 2012 trophy cabinet, with the FA Cup. Bayern had ended up empty-handed after Borussia Dortmund had outstripped them in the Bundesliga and then crushed them 5-2 in the German Cup Final. They were determined not to finish the season as triple runners-up, an unwanted record that fellow Bundesliga outfit Bayer Leverkusen had achieved in 2002.

Chelsea should have competed in the very first European Champions Cup, back in 1955-56. They had been invited – along with the likes of Real Madrid, Milan and Reims – but declined under orders from the Football League. Now,

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL

May 19 – Munich (Allianz Arena)

BAYERN MUNICH 1 (Muller 83)
CHELSEA 1 (Drogba 88)

HT: 0-0. 90min: 0-0. Att: 62,500. Ref: Proenca (Por)
Chelsea won 4-3 on penalties
Shoot-out (Bayern first):
Lahm 1-0, Mata saved 1-0; Gomez 2-0, David Luiz 2-1; Neuer 3-1, Lampard 3-2; Olic saved 3-2, Cole 3-3; Schweinsteiger hit post 3-3; Drogba 3-4.

BAYERN MUNICH
Neuer – Lahm, Boateng, Tymoshchuk, Contento – Schweinsteiger, Kroos – Robben, Muller (Van Buyten 87), Ribery (Olic 96) – Gomez.
Coach: Heynckes

CHELSEA
Cech – Bosingwa, Cahill, David Luiz, Cole – Mikel – Kalou (Torres 84), Mata, Lampard, Bertrand (Malouda 73) – Drogba.
Coach: Di Matteo

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more than 50 years later, they had another crack at winning Europe's premier trophy, although it was also seen as a last chance for many of the club's ageing stars.

Not all their squad were veterans. The surprise selection was 22-year-old reserve left-back Ryan Bertrand, who lined up wide in midfield, in front of Ashley Cole, to help contain the threat posed by Robben's link with right-back Philipp Lahm. Bertrand had made only seven Premier League starts and no player had previously made his Champions League debut in the Final.

Abramovich...a dream fulfilled

Yet Chelsea's interim manager Roberto Di Matteo, whose single-game planning has proved matchless, did not even consider Bertrand's selection a gamble. It was, he explained, merely the obvious outcome of preparatory work in training. His Chelsea squad, though, were undoubtedly the more seriously weakened by the suspensions picked up during the two clubs' semi-final victories – over Real Madrid and Barcelona respectively – and they went into a Final, being played at Bayern's home ground, Munich's Allianz Arena, very much as the underdog.

The Germans accepted the responsibility of setting the tempo in their own fortress. Ribery had a shot deflected wide for a left-wing corner, then Toni Kroos sent a drive skidding safely wide. The scramble for territory also brought an early booking for Bastian Schweinsteiger for a silly, nervy handball. Actually, it was more than silly. Very possibly that yellow card, and the fear of a second, contributed to the midfielder's below-par showing.

Chelsea continued to resist solidly, prompting Robben and Muller to start roaming. The switch almost paid off in the 21st minute. Robben turned up on the left, slipped into the penalty box and

CHELSEA

WHAT THEY SAID

ROBERTO DI MATTEO
(Interim manager):
"Football is sometimes unpredictable and crazy. I don't think anyone would have predicted what has happened in these last three months. To finish like this is an incredible achievement by this team.

"The players have worked so hard for many, many years to achieve this objective. The heart and passion they have shown, in this competition especially, has been immense and our preparation even for the Final was very difficult with four players suspended and two defenders out for two or three weeks.

It wasn't an ideal situation, but the desire and motivation of these players shone through."

DIDIER DROGBA
(Scorer of the winning penalty):
"In Moscow it was very painful for the players, the club and fans and now we have managed to change it around in an amazing game, a crazy game. When it came to my penalty I still had in my head what happened in the African Nations Cup but I was confident because of all the things that had happened for us.

"Petr Cech is the best goalkeeper in the world: all the saves he made today and before – he took us there. So when I went to take my penalty I wanted to score for him and for my team-mates, and I wanted to make JT [John Terry] smile – unlike the other time. This is the best win ever for the fans who supported us even when we conceded the goal.

"The way we played this season in the Champions League, turning things around against Napoli and Barcelona, means I think we are great champions and deserve to be champions."

JOHN TERRY
(Chelsea's suspended captain):
"It was worse watching than playing. The lads were fantastic. When a match goes to penalties, it's amazing how the momentum swings. Once they missed that second penalty that was it, it was always going our way.

"When you look at it, we were 3-1 down against Napoli, then in the quarter-finals against Benfica. Everyone had ruled us out of this competition early on, even today they scored in the 83rd minute and Didier comes up with a goal.

"Sometimes things are meant to be and I'm so happy it's meant to be Chelsea this year."

ASHLEY COLE
(Scored in the shoot-out):
"We should have probably lost the game with the amount of chances Bayern had but, like against Napoli, we rode our luck. But then again, I think we deserved it."

Final kick...Drogba coolly slots himself and Chelsea into the history books

Robben...his penalty miss proved crucial

fired in a low drive that caught Cech unsighted. Fortunately for Chelsea the ball ricocheted off the keeper's shins and up against his right-hand post.

Ribery was briefly forced off after being kicked on the back of the ankle by Jose Bosingwa, and this was a prelude to Chelsea's first half-chance, a free-kick on the right which Mata curled over the wall but also over the bar.

Ribery, back on the pitch, pulled a shot wide and then played in Diego Contento on an overlapping run for a cross from which Muller volleyed wastefully wide. Suddenly the game snapped up a gear. Chelsea kept pace with a fast counter-attack which saw Manuel Neuer forced into a save by a near-post drive from Salomon Kalou.

Bayern should have been ahead at the break. A rapier break conjured by Muller and Robben ended with Mario Gomez cleverly turning David Luiz, but he blasted his shot over the bar from only 12 yards out. For a man who had scored 26 Bundesliga goals it was a terrible miss and neatly summed up his largely ineffective performance.

Bayern did manage to put the ball in the net seven minutes after the break. Muller was again the creative force, this time breaking down the left. Robben's shot ricocheted off Ashley Cole to Ribery who put the ball into the net, but he was correctly ruled offside.

Keeping them out

For Chelsea, Cole was the game's most influential performer. Minutes later he saved his side once again, flinging himself in the path of another effort from Robben. The Dutchman was at the heart of every attacking effort and yet Bayern were struggling to make any real impression in the Chelsea area where Gary Cahill and Luiz were, for the most part, in command.

Bayern continued to press. Ribery's deflected cross was pushed over the bar by Cech and then Muller dragged a shot wide after a sweeping move involving Schweinsteiger, Robben and Ribery. Then finally Muller broke the deadlock with a close-range header after Ribery sent in another cross from the left.

With just three minutes left, Heynckes shored up things at the back by introducing Daniel Van Buyten in place of Muller, but it was to no avail. Chelsea charged forward, forced a right-wing corner and the relentless Drogba headed home Mata's kick at the near post.

It was Drogba's ninth goal in nine Finals for Chelsea and had come from the only corner they won all night.

Extra time saw Chelsea briefly seize the attacking initiative, but then Ribery broke into the box and Drogba, chasing back, caught the back of his ankles. Robben drove the resulting penalty low and hard to Cech's left but the Chelsea goalkeeper pulled off a brilliant save.

Robben had missed the penalty which effectively handed the German league title to Borussia Dortmund; now he had repeated the trick in a Champions League Final against his old club. And penalties would prove to be an even more decisive factor once the final whistle was blown.

In the history of European Champions' Finals, German clubs had won just one of the previous nine

> It was Drogba's ninth goal in nine Finals for Chelsea

(Bayern against Valencia in 2001), while English clubs had won three (Liverpool in 1984 and 2005, and Manchester United in 2008).

Make that four now, even though Mata saw Chelsea's first kick saved by Neuer. The shoot-out turned Chelsea's way first when Cech saved Ivica Olic's fourth Bayern penalty and then when Schweinsteiger – who scored the shoot-out winner in the semi-final against Real Madrid – hit a post.

Drogba was presented with the chance to make history. Twice he had fluffed crucial penalties in the African Nations Cup and he had also been sent off in the 2008 Champions League Final. No better time and place then to make amends. **WS**

BAYERN

WHAT THEY SAID

JUPP HEYNCKES
(Coach):
"I have to congratulate Chelsea on their victory. I must also say that they played the way we expected. We can blame only ourselves for having so many goalscoring opportunities without being able to score until the 83rd minute. If you don't take your chances then you run the risk of being punished for it."

FRANZ BECKENBAUER
(Honorary president):
"What were Chelsea supposed to do when Bayern did not take advantage of all their possession? Certainly Chelsea had luck on their side and that is why they ended up as deserved winners of the Champions League – even though Bayern controlled all of the game. It just wasn't meant to be."

Kings of Europe...Chelsea's ecstatic squad show off the Champions League trophy

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Abramovich rips up the rule book

Russian owner's policy of changing coaches pays off with victory in Munich

On board...Chelsea owner Abramovich joins the open-top bus parade

Roman Abramovich had skipped Chelsea's semi-final victory in Barcelona for fear of jinxing the players as they attempted the near-impossible task of beating Barca in their own backyard.

But after the team had again defied the odds to beat Bayern in Munich to claim their first European Cup, club owner Abramovich hugged the Chelsea players as they ascended the steps of the Allianz Arena. He then joined them on the podium as they lifted the trophy.

The "billionaire from nowhere" was how *World Soccer* described Abramovich when in 2003, out of the blue, he stepped in to save Chelsea from the brink. Nine years and some £2billion later, we are no wiser as to his motives for buying the club. He has not given a single interview in that time.

There has been no explanation for his brutal sacking of managers, yet there is a common theme to the changes: a desire to win the Champions League.

Claudio Ranieri was sacked after his tactics backfired in the 2004 semi-final against Monaco. Abramovich's disenchantment with Jose Mourinho reached a point of no return after a goalless draw at home to Rosenborg in the group stages in 2007-08. Avram Grant did not survive the penalty shoot-out defeat to Manchester United in Moscow later that campaign. Carlo Ancelotti departed having won the domestic double but having fallen in Europe. This season, the writing was on the wall for Andre Villas-Boas after an away defeat to Napoli.

Only Luis Felipe Scolari, sacked in February 2009 before the team were due to face Juventus in the Champions League last 16, departed because of poor Premier League form. That the Champions League has become Abramovich's obsession is beyond doubt. Though it is impossible to second-guess Abramovich, we are told by his advisors that he covets a coach or manager who will play fast, technical, attacking football. Barcelona are the model that Abramovich would most like to emulate.

> Chelsea's victory went against everything Abramovich believes in

The great irony of Chelsea's victory in Germany was that it went against everything that Abramovich is said to believe in. After the mid-season sacking of Villas-Boas, a man with a long-term plan to play more attacking football, Abramovich appointed Roberto Di Matteo as interim boss to see out the season. Yet Di Matteo, following a doctrine of cautious, safety-first football ended up winning the prize that had eluded his six predecessors.

During his team talk at full-time in the Final, Di Matteo could be heard shouting: "Discipline, discipline. Half an hour to go!"

Di Matteo may have achieved the impossible by winning on penalties in Munich when the odds were so heavily stacked against his Chelsea side. But he is by no means guaranteed a future at Stamford Bridge.

Transfer strategy

Chelsea's summer transfer strategy is said to have been overseen by technical director Michael Emenalo. Chelsea won the race to sign Eden Hazard from Lille but they will have to pay more than £30million for the privilege. Brazilian striker Hulk is likely to cost even more from Porto.

Didier Drogba and Nicolas Anelka have left and others – such as Salomon Kalou, Florent Malouda, Jose Bosingwa and Paulo Ferreira – may follow. But even with big-earners off the payroll, Chelsea face a struggle to comply with UEFA's Financial Fairplay regulations.

Winning the Champions League will boost revenue through extra prize money and sponsor bonuses, possibly by as much as £25m, but extra income may be needed if Abramovich pursues his plan to sign outgoing Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola when he returns from his sabbatical.

Whether or not Chelsea meet with approval from UEFA's bookkeepers, it is clear that Chelsea's victory in Munich has reignited Roman Abramovich's passion for the club.

Gavin Hamilton

Delivery man... Di Matteo won the Champions League but will he keep his job at Chelsea?

Record breakers

On target...Ronaldo celebrates scoring for Real Madrid against Sporting Gijon in La Liga

Ronaldo's glory

Sid Lowe applauds a breathtaking season for Madrid's star forward

They had waited four years for this; almost 1,500 days. Sunday night at the Santiago Bernabeu and the party was in full swing. One by one the players were called up, jogging across the white surface, waving as they made their way to a huge platform in the middle of the pitch. Fireworks exploded from the roof and Placido Domingo gave a rendition of the club's centenary anthem. At long last, Real Madrid had wrested the title from Barcelona. After three consecutive titles heading to the Camp Nou, this one was Bernabeu bound.

They had clinched it in record-breaking style, too. On the final day, Madrid defeated Mallorca and those three points took them to 100 - a La Liga record. They had also won more games (32) and scored more goals (121) than any team before and had blown teams away in the final weeks. Just when it looked like being difficult, they were simply too good and they won in Bilbao, Pamplona and at the Vicente Calderon. They also won at the Camp Nou, of course, with a 2-1 victory that virtually secured the title.

About the only record Real Madrid did not break was the individual goalscoring one. Last season Cristiano Ronaldo bettered the 38 set by Telmo Zarra and Hugo Sanchez as the league's all-time best for a single season. This time he scored 46. But there was just one problem – so had Lionel Messi. The Argentinian finished the season with 50, relegating Ronaldo to second best.

Last season, when Ronaldo outscored Messi, there was something missing. He scored 11 goals in the last four games – when the title had already escaped Real – and, at the presentation of the ESM Golden Shoe in Madrid, the media asked if he would have swapped the individual awards for team success. He was a Spanish Cup winner but the league and Champions League had evaded him. He, of course, said yes.

This time round, the roles were reversed. Messi hit nine goals in the three games immediately after Madrid beat Barcelona in the league. That took him beyond Ronaldo's reach, but it did not serve to win anything. He had also been unable to score against Chelsea in the semi-final of the Champions League. Messi's figures were astonishing, barely believable. Fifty league goals, top scorer in the Champions League for the third consecutive season and some of his performances beggared belief.

Victors...Ronaldo and Real defender Marcelo (left) hoist the league trophy

Pichichi disappointment

There is little doubt that Messi winning the Pichichi award, and with it the Golden Shoe, disappointed Ronaldo. In the last few games, Madrid's aim was clearly to help their team-mate to the top of the goalscorers' charts. But inside Spain, this was Ronaldo's season.

"The league is his," ran one newspaper cover. It was an exaggeration - other players performed brilliantly, from Sergio Ramos to Xabi Alonso, and Mesut Ozil to Karim Benzema - but not especially outlandish.

"I'd give the team nine out of 10," Ronaldo said. "And myself 10 out of 10." Asked the inevitable question about himself and Messi, he replied, just as he had last year: "You can't compare a Ferrari and a Porsche." Then he added with a smile: "I think I'm better."

Cocky? Perhaps, but this season he is entitled to think so. This season Ronaldo led Madrid to the title. He scored half of his total away from home, including goals in Malaga, Valencia, Seville, Villarreal, Pamplona and Bilbao. He scored a hat-trick away at Atletico Madrid - the first Real player to do so since Alfredo Di Stefano 50 years earlier. Before he missed the penalty against Bayern Munich he had already scored twice. And it was Ronaldo who scored against Barcelona.

That night, Ronaldo's celebration was eloquent. Running to the touchline, he stood with his chest out and pointed as if to say: "Relax, I'm here. Leave it to me." It was not a bad idea. For the third game in a row he had scored at the Camp Nou. The *clasicos* used to be where any Messi-Ronaldo doubt was blown away: the Argentinian dominated, the Portuguese disappeared. Or so they said. It was never really fair. Now, it is just plain wrong. Ronaldo has scored in four of the last five *clasicos*, among them the winner in the Spanish Cup Final last season.

This season he scored the goal that effectively won Real Madrid the league for the first time in four years. WS

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Record in sight...Messi hails a goal against Valencia at Camp Nou

Messi's prizes

Gavin Hamilton celebrates the Argentinian's ground-breaking season for Barcelona

The numbers do not lie. In the 2011-12 season, Lionel Messi scored 73 goals for Barcelona: 50 in the Spanish league, six in the Spanish Cup and Super Cup, and a record 17 in European and international club competitions.

His single-season total surpassed Gerd Muller's previous European club campaign record of 67 for Bayern Munich in 1972-73.

Messi began the season with goals and accolades: he won the inaugural Best Player in Europe on the eve of the European Super Cup against Porto, where he scored in Barcelona's 2-0 victory. *World Soccer*'s World Player and the FIFA Ballon d'Or followed.

The Spanish Cup proved consolation for Barca after missing out on La Liga and Champions League. Inevitably, Messi chipped in with a goal in the 3-0 win over Athletic Bilbao in the Final.

Of those goals, 50 were scored in the league, earning Messi the ESM Golden Shoe for the second time.

But this was not just another victory for Messi; his half-century of league goals was the largest amassed by the winner in the history of the Golden Shoe, which was first presented to Eusebio in 1968.

Ronaldo eclipsed

Messi eclipsed last year's ESM Golden Shoe winner Cristiano Ronaldo, whose 46 goals would have won the award on any previous occasion.

Arsenal and Holland striker Robin Van Persie, who was acclaimed as the best player in the Premier League by both players and football writers, finished a distant third having scored 30 league goals.

The gap between Van Persie and Messi serves only to illustrate the immensity of the Argentinian's ground-breaking season. WS

Finale...Messi grabs his 73rd goal of the season with Barca's second against Athletic Bilbao in the Spanish Cup Final

ESM EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA GOLDEN SHOE

FINAL STANDINGS

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Lionel Messi	Barcelona (Spa)	50	2	100
2	Cristiano Ronaldo	Real Madrid (Spa)	46	2	92
3	Robin Van Persie	Arsenal (Eng)	30	2	60
4	Klaas-Jan Huntelaar	Schalke (Ger)	29	2	58
5	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Milan (Ita)	28	2	56
6	Wayne Rooney	Manchester United (Eng)	27	2	54
7	Mario Gomez	Bayern Munich (Ger)	26	2	52
8	Burak Yilmaz	Trabzonspor (Tur)	32	1.5	48
	Bas Dost	Heerenveen (Hol)	32	1.5	48
	Radamel Falcao	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	24	2	48
	Diego Milito	Internazionale (Ita)	24	2	48
12	Sergio Aguero	Manchester City (Eng)	23	2	46
	Edinson Cavani	Napoli (Ita)	23	2	46
	Aleksandrs Cekulajevs	Trans Narva (Est)	46	1	46
	Antonio Di Natale	Udinese (Ita)	23	2	46
16	Papiss Demba Cisse	Freiburg (Ger)/Newcastle (Eng)	22	2	44
	Gonzalo Higuain	Real Madrid (Spa)	22	2	44
	Robert Lewandowski	Borussia Dortmund (Ger)	22	2	44
19	Karim Benzema	Real Madrid (Spa)	21	2	42
	Seydou Doumbia	CSKA Moscow (Rus)	21	2	42
	Olivier Giroud	Montpellier (Fra)	21	2	42
	Nene	Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)	21	2	42
23	Wesley Lopes	Vaslui (Rom)	27	1.5	40.5
24	Eden Hazard	Lille (Fra)	20	2	40
25.	Nikica Jelavic	Rangers(Sco)/Everton (Eng)	14+9	1.5/2	39
26	Rodrigo Palacio	Genoa (Ita)	19	2	38
27	Luuk De Jong	Twente (Hol)	25	1.5	37.5
	David Lafata	Jablonec(CzR)	25	1.5	37.5
	Sanharib Malki	Roda JC (Hol)	25	1.5	37.5
30	Alexander Frei	Basel (Swi)	24	1.5	36
	Gary Hooper	Celtic (Sco)	24	1.5	36
	Claudio Pizarro	Werder Bremen (Ger)	18	2	36
	Lukas Podolski	Cologne (Ger)	18	2	36
	Marco Reus	Borussia M'gladbach (Ger)	18	2	36

Premier class...Van Persie

Bundesliga winner...Huntelaar

Serie A star...Ibrahimovic

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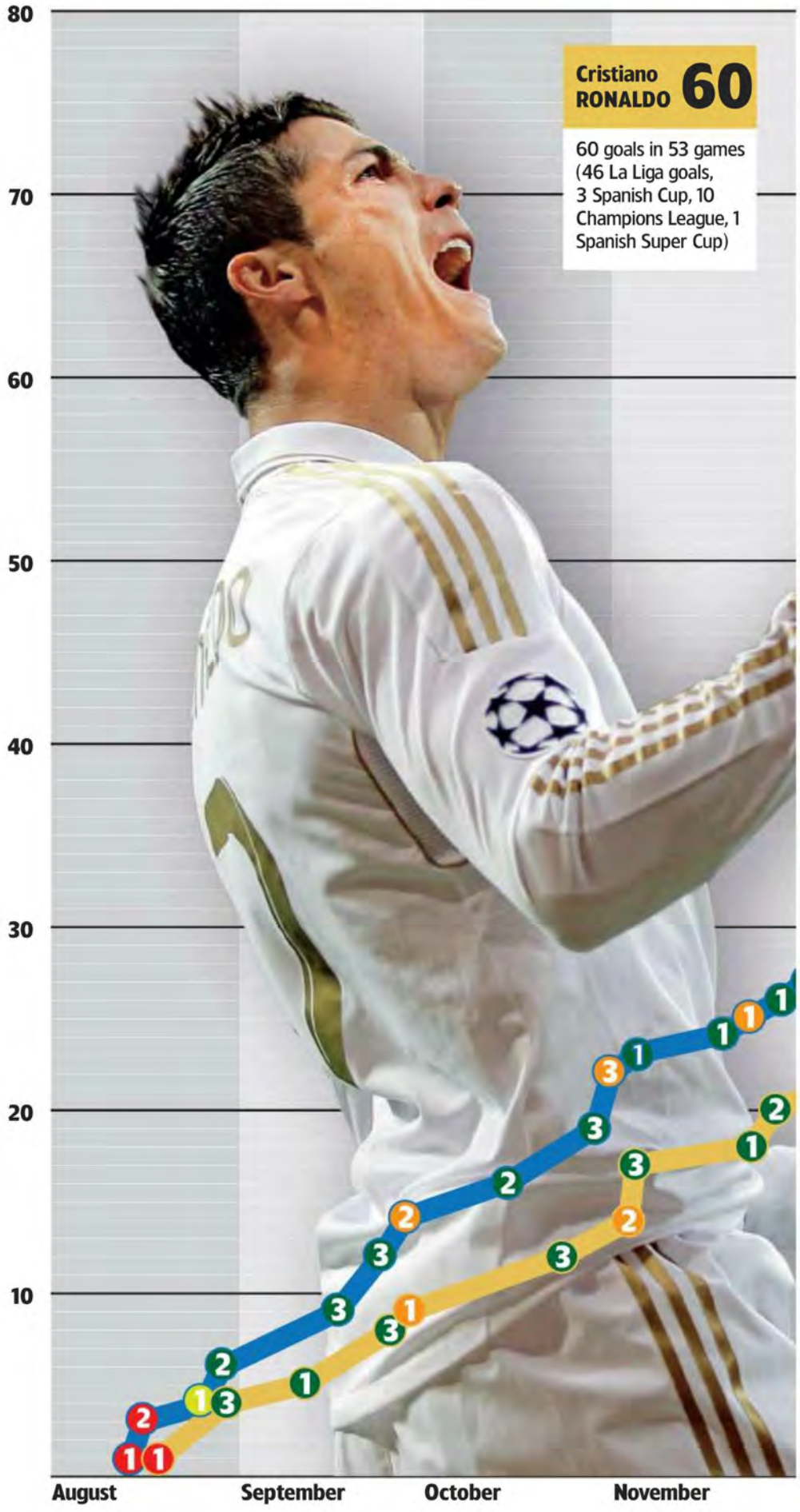
How the record-breaking season unfolded

Week by week, all the club goals scored during the 2011-12 season by Ronaldo and Messi



Key

- Messi Goals
- Ronaldo Goals
- La Liga
- Champions League
- Spanish Cup
- Spanish Super Cup
- UEFA Super Cup
- Club World Cup

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ESM TEAM OF THE SEASON

Based on the number of appearances in Team of the Month during 2011-12

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

ESM – EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

The members of ESM are:

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Sport (Belgium)
Sport Express (Russia)
De Telegraaf (Holland)
TIPSbladet (Denmark)
World Soccer (England)

SEASON RANKINGS

Cummulative votes through the season (votes cast in September, October, November, December 2011 and January, February, March, April, May 2012)

GOALKEEPERS

Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)	24 votes
Petr Cech (Chelsea)	11
Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus)	9
Iker Casillas (Real Madrid)	9
Joe Hart (Manchester City)	7
Christian Abbiati (Milan)	2
Thibaut Courtois (Atletico Madrid)	2
David De Gea (Manchester United)	2
Tim Krul (Newcastle United)	2
Victor Valdes (Barcelona)	2
Massimiliano Benassi (Lecce)	1
Morgan De Sanctis (Napoli)	1
Hugo Lloris (Lyon)	1
Pepe Reina (Liverpool)	1
Salvatore Sirigu (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Wojciech Szczesny (Arsenal)	1
Marc-Andre Ter Stegen (B M'gladbach)	1
Javi Varas (Sevilla)	1
Tolga Zengin (Trabzonspor)	1
Ron-Robert Zieler (Hanover)	1

DEFENDERS

Vincent Kompany (Manchester City)	29
Dani Alves (Barcelona)	24
Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund)	15
Thiago Silva (Milan)	14
Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich)	13
Marcelo (Real Madrid)	13
Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid)	11
Ashley Cole (Chelsea)	10
Holger Badstuber (Bayern Munich)	9
Daniel Van Buyten (Bayern Munich)	9
Patrice Evra (Manchester United)	8
David Alaba (Bayern Munich)	6
Lukasz Piszczek (Borussia Dortmund)	6
Stefan Lichtsteiner (Juventus)	6
Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus)	5
Phil Jones (Manchester United)	5
Carles Puyol (Barcelona)	5
John Terry (Chelsea)	5
Andrea Barzagli (Juventus)	4
Dante (Borussia Monchengladbach)	4
Branislav Ivanovic (Chelsea)	4
Joleon Lescott (Manchester City)	4
David Luiz (Chelsea)	4
Pepe (Real Madrid)	4
Nemanja Vidic (Manchester United)	4
Gerard Pique (Barcelona)	3
Thomas Vermaelen (Arsenal)	3
Eric Abidal (Barcelona)	2
Daniel Agger (Liverpool)	2
Mathieu Debuchy (Lille)	2
Rio Ferdinand (Manchester United)	2
Ledley King (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Lucio (Internazionale)	2
Rafinha (Bayern Munich)	2
Micah Richards (Manchester City)	2
Andre Santos (Arsenal)	2
Marcel Schmelzer (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Fernando Amorebieta (Athletic Bilbao)	1
Alvaro Arbeloa (Real Madrid)	1
Michel Bastos (Lyon)	1
Henri Bedimo (Montpellier)	1
Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus)	1
Jose Bosingwa (Chelsea)	1
Gary Cahill (Chelsea)	1
Paolo Cannavaro (Napoli)	1
Ricardo Carvalho (Real Madrid)	1
Fabio Coentrao (Real Madrid)	1
Jose Enrique (Liverpool)	1
Paulo Jorge (APOEL)	1
Juanfran (Atletico Madrid)	1
Aleksandar Kolarov (Manchester City)	1
Laurent Koscielny (Arsenal)	1
Diego Lugano (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Filipe Luis (Atletico Madrid)	1
Maicon (Internazionale)	1
Javi Martinez (Athletic Bilbao)	1
Alessandro Nesta (Milan)	1
Nicolas Nkoulou (Marseille)	1
Kyriakos Papadopoulos (Schalke)	1
Alvaro Pereira (Porto)	1
Adil Rami (Valencia)	1
Martin Skrtel (Liverpool)	1
Chris Smalling (Manchester United)	1
Nicolas Spolli (Catania)	1
Ron Vlaar (Feyenoord)	1
Kyle Walker (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Mapou Yanga-Mbiwa (Montpellier)	1
Javier Zanetti (Internazionale)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Xavi (Barcelona)	25
Shinji Kagawa (Borussia Dortmund)	15
Mesut Ozil (Real Madrid)	15
Andrea Pirlo (Juventus)	14
Franck Ribery (Bayern Munich)	11
David Silva (Manchester City)	11
Marco Reus (Borussia Monchengladbach)	9
Gareth Bale (Tottenham Hotspur)	8
Cesc Fabregas (Barcelona)	7
Andres Iniesta (Barcelona)	7
Frank Lampard (Chelsea)	6
Ramires (Chelsea)	6
Kevin-Prince Boateng (Milan)	5
Eden Hazard (Lille)	5
Nani (Manchester United)	5
Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich)	5
Xabi Alonso (Real Madrid)	4
Mario Gotze (Borussia Dortmund)	4
Toni Kroos (Bayern Munich)	4
Ezequiel Lavezzi (Napoli)	4
Javier Pastore (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Arturo Vidal (Juventus)	4
Juan Arango (Borussia Monchengladbach)	3
Sergio Busquets (Barcelona)	3
Diego (Atletico Madrid)	3
Claudio Marchisio (Juventus)	3
Alex Song (Arsenal)	3
Pablo Aimar (Benfica)	2
Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid)	2
Ryan Giggs (Manchester United)	2
Jon Obi Mikel (Chelsea)	2
Luka Modric (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Antonio Nocerino (Milan)	2
Yaya Toure (Manchester City)	2
Charlie Adam (Liverpool)	1
Younes Belhanda (Montpellier)	1
Daniel Caligiuri (Freiburg)	1
Michael Carrick (Manchester United)	1
Patrick Herrmann (Borussia M'gladbach)	1
Kaka (Real Madrid)	1
Sebastian Kehl (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Alessandro Matri (Milan)	1
Dries Mertens (PSV)	1
Samir Nasri (Manchester City)	1
Nene (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Park Ji-sung (Manchester United)	1
Scott Parker (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Simone Pepe (Juventus)	1
Paul Scholes (Manchester United)	1
Markel Susaeta (Athletic Bilbao)	1
Mark Van Bommel (Milan)	1
Rafael Van der Vaart (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Theo Walcott (Arsenal)	1
Granit Xhaka (Basle)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel Messi (Barcelona)	59
Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)	48
Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)	36
Radamel Falcao (Atletico Madrid)	17
Didier Drobga (Chelsea)	13
Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)	13
Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)	8
Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)	8
Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)	8
Robert Lewandowski (Borussia Dortmund)	7
Juan Mata (Chelsea)	6
Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)	3
Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (Schalke)	3
Fernando Llorente (Athletic Bilbao)	3
Alexis Sanchez (Barcelona)	3
Roberto Soldado (Valencia)	3
Mario Balotelli (Manchester City)	2
Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)	2
Edinson Cavani (Napoli)	2
Papiss Cisse (Newcastle United)	2
Olivier Giroud (Montpellier)	2
Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich)	2
Demba Ba (Newcastle United)	1
Hatem Ben Arfa (Newcastle United)	1
Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)	1
Miroslav Klose (Lazio)	1
Leandro Lima (Braga)	1
Alessandro Matri (Juventus)	1
Diego Milito (Internazionale)	1
Nene (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Raul (Schalke)	1
Arjen Robben (Bayern Munich)	1
Carlos Tevez (Manchester City)	1
Francesco Totti (Roma)	1

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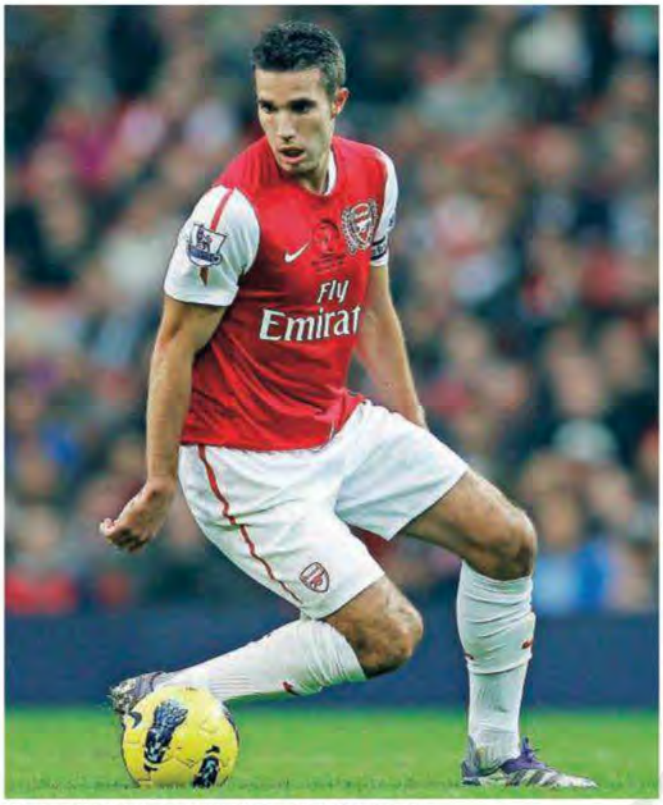
ESM XI FOR APRIL 2012

Target...Kagawa is one of Europe's most sought-after players



Hit man...Van Persie was Arsenal's top scorer this season

ESM XI FOR MAY 2012

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William HILL THE HOME OF BETTING

50-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
CZECH REPUBLIC

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Petr CECH	(30) 20.05.82	Chelsea (Eng)
23	Jaroslav DROBNY	(32) 18.10.79	Hamburg (Ger)
16	Jan LASTUVKA	(29) 07.07.82	Dnipro (Ukr)
DEFENDERS			
2	Theodor GEBRE SELASSIE	(25) 24.12.86	Slovan Liberec
5	Roman HUBNIK	(28) 06.06.84	Hertha Berlin (Ger)
3	Michal KADLEC	(27) 13.12.84	Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
8	David LIMBERSKY	(28) 06.10.83	Viktoria Plzen
12	Frantisek RAJTORAL	(26) 12.03.86	Viktoria Plzen
6	Tomas SIVOK	(28) 15.09.83	Besiktas (Tur)
4	Marek SUCHY	(24) 29.03.88	Spartak Moscow (Rus)
MIDFIELDERS			
22	Vladimir DARIDA	(21) 08.08.90	Viktoria Plzen
17	Tomas HUBSCHMAN	(30) 04.09.81	Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
19	Petr JIRACEK	(26) 02.03.86	Wolfsburg (Ger)
18	Daniel KOLAR	(26) 27.10.85	Viktoria Plzen
11	Milan PETRZELA	(28) 19.06.83	Viktoria Plzen
14	Vaclav PILAR	(23) 13.10.88	Viktoria Plzen
13	Jaroslav PLASIL	(30) 05.01.82	Bordeaux (Fra)
9	Jan REZEK	(30) 05.05.82	Anorthosis (Cyp)
10	Tomas ROSICKY	(31) 04.10.80	Arsenal (Eng)
FORWARDS			
15	Milan BAROS	(30) 28.10.81	Galatasaray (Tur)
21	David LAFATA	(30) 18.09.81	Jablonec
7	Tomas NECID	(22) 13.08.89	CSKA Moscow (Rus)
20	Tomas PEKHART	(23) 26.05.89	Nuremberg (Ger)
COACH			
Michal BILEK		(47) 13.04.65	

● Coach Michal Bilek signed a new contract, committing him to the national team until 2014 ... Vladimir Darida replaced left-sided midfielder Daniel Pudil, who has a hand injury, after making an impressive debut in the 2-1 friendly victory over Israel.

66-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
GREECE

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Kostas CHALKIAS	(38) 30.05.74	PAOK
13	Michalis SIFAKIS	(27) 09.09.84	Aris
12	Alexandros TZORVAS	(29) 12.08.82	Palermo (Ita)
DEFENDERS			
20	Jose HOLEBAS	(27) 27.06.84	Olympiakos
4	Stelios MALEZAS	(27) 11.03.85	PAOK
2	Giannis MANIATIS	(25) 12.10.86	Olympiakos
8	Avraam PAPADOPOULOS	(27) 03.12.84	Olympiakos
5	Kyriakos PAPADOPOULOS	(20) 23.02.92	Schalke (Ger)
19	Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS	(23) 09.06.88	Werder Bremen (Ger)
15	Vasilis TOROSIDIS	(26) 10.06.85	Olympiakos
3	Giorgos TZAVELAS	(24) 26.11.87	Monaco (Fra)
MIDFIELDERS			
23	Giannis FETFATZIDIS	(21) 21.12.90	Olympiakos
22	Kostas FORTOUNIS	(19) 16.10.92	Kaiserslautern (Ger)
16	Giorgos FOTAKIS	(30) 29.10.81	PAOK
10	Giorgos KARAGOUNIS	(35) 06.03.77	Panathinaikos
21	Kostas KATSOURANIS	(32) 21.06.79	Panathinaikos
6	Grigoris MAKOS	(25) 18.01.87	AEK
18	Sotiris NINIS	(22) 03.04.90	Panathinaikos
FORWARDS			
17	Fanis GEKAS	(32) 23.05.80	Samsunspor (Tur)
9	Nikos LIBEROPOULOS	(36) 04.08.75	AEK
11	Kostas MITROGLOU	(24) 12.03.88	Olympiakos
14	Dimitris SALPIGIDIS	(30) 18.08.81	PAOK
7	Giorgos SAMARAS	(27) 21.02.85	Celtic (Sco)
COACH			
FERNANDO SANTOS (Por)		(57) 10.10.54	

● Alexandros Tziolis and Panagiotis Kone were the two players to miss out from the initial 25-man squad.

50-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
POLAND

GOALKEEPERS			
12	Grzegorz SANDOMIERSKI	(22) 05.09.89	Genk (Blg)
1	Wojciech SZCZESNY	(22) 18.04.90	Arsenal (Eng)
22	Przemyslaw TYTON	(25) 04.01.87	PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
DEFENDERS			
2	Sebastian BOENISCH	(25) 01.02.87	Werder Bremen (Ger)
15	Marcin KAMINSKI	(20) 15.01.92	Lech Poznan
4	Damien PERQUIS	(28) 10.04.84	Sochaux (Fra)
20	Lukasz PISZCZEK	(27) 03.06.85	B Dortmund (Ger)
13	Marcin WASILEWSKI	(31) 09.06.80	Anderlecht (Blg)
14	Jakub WAWRZYNIAK	(28) 07.07.83	Legia Warsaw
3	Grzegorz WOJTKOWIAK	(28) 26.01.84	Lech Poznan
MIDFIELDERS			
16	Jakub BLASZCZYKOWSKI	(26) 14.12.85	B Dortmund (Ger)
5	Dariusz DUDKA	(28) 09.12.83	Auxerre (Fra)
21	Kamil GROSICKI	(24) 08.06.88	Sivasspor (Tur)
6	Adam MATUSZCZYK	(23) 14.02.89	Cologne (Ger)
18	Adrian MIERZEJEWSKI	(25) 06.11.86	Trabzonspor (Tur)
11	Rafal MURAWSKI	(30) 09.10.81	Lech Poznan
10	Ludovic OBRANIAK	(27) 10.11.84	Bordeaux (Fra)
7	Eugen POLANSKI	(26) 17.03.86	Mainz (Ger)
8	Maciej RYBUS	(22) 19.08.89	Terek Grozny (Rus)
17	Rafal WOLSKI	(19) 10.11.92	Legia Warsaw
FORWARDS			
23	Pawel BROZEK	(29) 21.04.83	Trabzonspor (Tur)
9	Robert LEWANDOWSKI	(23) 21.08.88	B Dortmund (Ger)
19	Artur SOBIECH	(21) 12.06.90	Hanover (Ger)
COACH			
Franciszek SMUDA		(63) 22.06.48	

● Arsenal goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski was replaced by Grzegorz Sandomierski after doctors decided it was too risky to include him in the final squad due to a shoulder injury ... Polonia Warsaw defender Tomasz Jodlowiec, Legia Warsaw striker Michal Kucharczyk and Torino defender Kamil Glik failed to make the cut from the original party of 26.

20-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
RUSSIA

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Igor AKINFEEV	(26) 08.04.86	CSKA Moscow
16	Vyacheslav MALAFEEV	(33) 04.03.79	Zenit
13	Anton SHUNIN	(25) 27.01.87	Dynamo Moscow
DEFENDERS			
2	Aleksandr ANYUKOV	(29) 28.09.82	Zenit
12	Aleksei BEREZUTSKY	(29) 20.06.82	CSKA Moscow
19	Vladimir GRANAT	(25) 22.05.87	Dynamo Moscow
4	Sergei IGNASHEVICH	(32) 14.07.79	CSKA Moscow
21	Kirill NABABKIN	(25) 08.09.86	CSKA Moscow
3	Roman SHARONOV	(35) 08.09.76	Rubin Kazan
5	Yuri ZHIRKOV	(28) 20.08.83	Anzhi Makhachkala
MIDFIELDERS			
7	Igor DENISOV	(28) 17.05.84	Zenit
17	Alan DZAGOEV	(21) 17.06.90	CSKA Moscow
22	Denis GLUSHAKOV	(25) 27.01.87	Lokomotiv Moscow
9	Marat IZMAILOV	(29) 21.09.82	Sporting Lisbon (Por)
15	Dmitri KOMBAROV	(25) 22.01.87	Spartak Moscow
23	Igor SEMSHOV	(34) 06.04.78	Dynamo Moscow
6	Roman SHIROKOV	(30) 06.07.81	Zenit
8	Konstantin ZYRYANOV	(34) 05.10.77	Zenit
FORWARDS			
10	Andrei ARSHAVIN	(31) 29.05.81	Arsenal (Eng)
11	Aleksandr KERZHAKOV	(29) 27.11.82	Zenit
18	Aleksandr KOKORIN	(21) 19.03.91	Dynamo Moscow
14	Roman PAVLYUCHENKO	(30) 15.12.81	Lokomotiv Moscow
20	Pavel POGREBNYAK	(28) 08.11.83	Fulham (Eng)
COACH			
Dick ADVOCAAT (Hol)		(64) 27.09.47	

● National coach Dick Advocaat signed a one-year deal to return to his Dutch homeland in July and coach PSV Eindhoven, the club he led to the Eredivisie title in 1997 ... defenders Vasili Berezutski and Roman Shishkin were ruled out with a right thigh muscle injury and a stomach complaint respectively.

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 * all ages correct as of 08.06.12

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100-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
DENMARK

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Stephan ANDERSEN	(30) 26.11.81	Evian (Fra)
16	Anders LINDEGAARD	(28) 13.04.84	Man United (Eng)
22	Kasper SCHMEICHEL	(25) 05.11.86	Leicester City (Eng)
DEFENDERS			
4	Daniel AGGER	(27) 12.12.84	Liverpool (Eng)
12	Andreas BJELLAND	(23) 11.07.88	Nordsjaelland
6	Lars JACOBSEN	(32) 20.09.79	Copenhagen
3	Simon KJAER	(23) 26.03.89	Wolfsburg (Ger)
13	Jores OKORE	(19) 11.08.92	Nordsjaelland
5	Simon POULSEN	(27) 07.10.84	AZ (Hol)
18	Daniel WASS	(23) 31.05.89	Evian (Fra)
MIDFIELDERS			
8	Christian ERIKSEN	(20) 14.02.92	Ajax (Hol)
20	Thomas KAHLENBERG	(29) 20.03.83	Wolfsburg (Ger)
7	William KVIST	(27) 24.02.85	Stuttgart (Ger)
2	Christian POULSEN	(32) 28.02.80	Evian (Fra)
19	Jakob POULSEN	(28) 07.07.83	Midtjylland
14	Lasse SCHONE	(26) 27.05.86	NEC (Hol)
15	Michael SILBERBAUER	(30) 07.07.81	Young Boys (Swi)
21	Niki ZIMLING	(27) 19.04.85	Club Brugge (Blg)
FORWARDS			
11	Nicklas BENDTNER	(24) 16.01.88	Arsenal (Eng)
9	Michael KROHN-DEHLI	(29) 06.06.83	Brondby
23	Tobias MIKKELSEN	(25) 18.09.86	Nordsjaelland
17	Nicklas PEDERSEN	(24) 10.10.87	Groningen (Hol)
10	Dennis ROMMEDAHL	(33) 22.07.78	Brondby
COACH			
Morten OLSEN		(62) 14.08.49	

● Goalkeeper Thomas Sorensen was forced to withdraw from the squad with a back injury and was replaced by Kasper Schmeichel.

3-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
GERMANY

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Manuel NEUER	(26) 27.03.86	Bayern Munich
12	Tim WIESE	(30) 17.12.81	Hoffenheim
22	Ron-Robert ZIELER	(23) 12.02.89	Hanover
DEFENDERS			
14	Holger BADSTUBER	(23) 13.03.89	Bayern Munich
20	Jerome BOATENG	(23) 03.09.88	Bayern Munich
4	Benedikt HOWEDES	(24) 29.02.88	Schalke
5	Mats HUMMELS	(23) 16.12.88	Borussia Dortmund
16	Philipp LAHM	(28) 11.11.83	Bayern Munich
17	Per MERTESACKER	(27) 29.09.84	Arsenal (Eng)
3	Marcel SCHMELZER	(24) 22.01.88	Borussia Dortmund
MIDFIELDERS			
15	Lars BENDER	(23) 27.04.89	Bayer Leverkusen
19	Mario GOTZE	(20) 03.06.92	Borussia Dortmund
2	Ilkay GUNDOGAN	(21) 24.10.90	Borussia Dortmund
6	Sami KHEDIRA	(25) 04.04.87	Real Madrid (Spa)
18	Toni KROOS	(22) 04.01.90	Bayern Munich
13	Thomas MULLER	(22) 13.09.89	Bayern Munich
8	Mesut OZIL	(23) 15.10.88	Real Madrid (Spa)
21	Marco REUS	(23) 31.05.89	Borussia Dortmund
9	Andre SCHURRLE	(21) 06.11.90	Bayer Leverkusen
7	Bastian SCHWEINSTEIGER	(27) 01.08.84	Bayern Munich
FORWARDS			
23	Mario GOMEZ	(26) 10.07.85	Bayern Munich
11	Miroslav KLOSE	(33) 09.06.78	Lazio (Ita)
10	Lukas PODOLSKI	(27) 04.06.85	Arsenal (Eng)
COACH			
Joachim LOW		(52) 03.02.60	

● Goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen and 18-year-old Julian Draxler, who made their international debuts in the 5-3 loss to Switzerland, missed out on the final squad of 23, along with Sven Bender and Cacau.

13-2 TO WIN EURO 2012
HOLLAND

GOALKEEPERS			
22	Tim KRUL	(24) 03.04.88	Newcastle United (Eng)
1	Maarten STEKELENBURG	(29) 22.09.82	Roma (Ita)
12	Michel VORM	(28) 20.10.83	Swansea City (Wal)
DEFENDERS			
21	Khalid BOULAHROUZ	(30) 28.12.81	Stuttgart (Ger)
5	Wilfred BOUMA	(33) 15.06.78	PSV
3	John HEITINGA	(28) 15.11.83	Everton (Eng)
4	Joris MATHIJSEN	(32) 05.04.80	Malaga (Spa)
14	Stijn SCHAARS	(28) 11.01.84	Sporting Lisbon (Por)
2	Gregory VAN DER WIEL	(24) 03.02.88	Ajax
13	Ron VLAAR	(27) 16.02.85	Feyenoord
15	Jetro WILLEMS	(18) 30.03.94	PSV
MIDFIELDERS			
20	Ibrahim AFELLAY	(26) 02.04.86	Barcelona (Spa)
8	Nigel DE JONG	(27) 30.11.84	Manchester City (Eng)
10	Wesley SNEIJDER	(27) 09.06.84	Internazionale (Ita)
17	Kevin STROOTMAN	(22) 13.02.90	PSV
6	Mark VAN BOMMEL	(35) 22.04.77	PSV
23	Rafael VAN DER VAART	(29) 11.02.83	Tottenham H (Eng)
FORWARDS			
18	Luuk DE JONG	(21) 27.08.90	Twente
9	Klaas-Jan HUNTELAAR	(28) 12.08.83	Schalke (Ger)
7	Dirk KUYT	(31) 22.07.80	Liverpool (Eng)
19	Luciano NARSINGH	(21) 13.09.90	Heerenveen
11	Arjen ROBBEN	(28) 23.01.84	Bayern Munich (Ger)
16	Robin VAN PERSIE	(28) 06.08.83	Arsenal (Eng)
COACH			
Bert VAN MARWIJK		(60) 19.05.52	

● PSV Eindhoven left-back Erik Pieters did not recover in time for selection after fracturing a metatarsal bone in his right foot ... Vurnon Anita, Siem De Jong, Jeremain Lens and Adam Maher were cut from the provisional 27-man squad.

20-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
PORTUGAL

GOALKEEPERS			
22	BETO	(30) 01.05.82	CFR Cluj (Rom)
1	EDUARDO	(29) 19.09.82	Genoa (Ita)
12	Rui PATRICIO	(24) 15.02.88	Sporting Lisbon
DEFENDERS			
2	Bruno ALVES	(30) 27.11.81	Zenit (Rus)
5	Fabio COENTRAO	(24) 11.03.88	Real Madrid (Spa)
13	Ricardo COSTA	(31) 16.05.81	Valencia (Spa)
19	Miguel LOPES	(25) 19.12.86	Porto
3	PEPE	(29) 26.02.83	Real Madrid (Spa)
21	Joao PEREIRA	(28) 25.02.84	Valencia (Spa)
14	ROLANDO	(26) 31.08.85	Porto
MIDFIELDERS			
6	CUSTODIO	(29) 24.05.83	Braga
16	Raul MEIRELES	(29) 17.03.83	Chelsea (Eng)
15	Ruben MICAEL	(25) 19.08.86	Atletico Madrid (Spa)
8	Joao MOUTINHO	(25) 08.09.86	Porto
20	Hugo VIANA	(29) 15.01.83	Braga
4	Miguel VELOSO	(26) 11.05.86	Genoa (Ita)
FORWARDS			
9	Hugo ALMEIDA	(28) 23.05.84	Besiktas (Tur)
17	NANI	(25) 17.11.86	Man United (Eng)
11	Nelson OLIVEIRA	(20) 08.08.91	Benfica
23	Helder POSTIGA	(29) 02.08.82	Real Zaragoza (Spa)
10	Ricardo QUARESMA	(28) 26.09.83	Besiktas (Tur)
7	Cristiano RONALDO	(27) 05.02.85	Real Madrid (Spa)
18	Silvestre VARELA	(27) 02.02.85	Porto
COACH			
Paulo BENTO		(42) 20.06.69	

● Paulo Bento will remain in charge of the national team beyond Euro 2012 after agreeing a new deal until July 2014 ... Hugo Viana replaced Carlos Martins, who was originally in the final 23, after he was ruled out with a calf injury.

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50-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
CROATIA

GOALKEEPERS			
12	Ivan KELAVA	(24) 20.02.88	Dinamo Zagreb
1	Stipe PLETIKOSA	(33) 08.01.79	Rostov (Rus)
23	Danijel SUBASIC	(27) 27.10.84	Monaco (Fra)
DEFENDERS			
4	Jurica BULJAT	(25) 12.08.86	Maccabi Haifa (Isr)
5	Vedran CORLUKA	(26) 05.02.86	Tottenham H (Eng)
6	Danijel PRANJIC	(30) 02.12.81	Bayern Munich (Ger)
13	Gordon SCHILDENFELD	(27) 18.03.85	Eint Frankfurt (Ger)
3	Josip SIMUNIC	(34) 18.02.78	Dinamo Zagreb
2	Ivan STRINIC	(24) 17.07.87	Dnipro (Ukr)
21	Domagoj VIDA	(23) 29.04.89	Dinamo Zagreb
MIDFIELDERS			
14	Milan BADELJ	(23) 25.02.89	Dinamo Zagreb
16	Tomislav DUJMOVIC	(31) 26.02.81	Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
15	Ivo ILICEVIC	(25) 14.11.86	Hamburg (Ger)
19	Niko KRANJCAR	(27) 13.08.84	Tottenham H (Eng)
10	Luka MODRIC	(26) 09.09.85	Tottenham H (Eng)
20	Ivan PERISIC	(23) 02.02.89	B Dortmund (Ger)
7	Ivan RAKITIC	(24) 10.03.88	Sevilla (Spa)
11	Darijo SRNA	(30) 01.05.82	Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
8	Ognjen VUKOJEVIC	(28) 20.12.83	Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
FORWARDS			
22	EDUARDO	(29) 25.02.83	Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
9	Nikica JELAVIC	(26) 27.08.85	Everton (Eng)
17	Mario MANDZUKIC	(26) 21.05.86	Wolfsburg (Ger)
18	Ivica OLIC	(32) 14.09.79	Wolfsburg (Ger)
COACH			
Slaven BILIC		(43) 11.09.68	

● Slaven Bilic will quit as national coach at the end of the tournament and take over at Russian Premier League side Lokomotiv Moscow .... Nikola Kalinic, Sime Vrsaljko, Goran Blazevic and Dejan Lovren were cut from the provisonal 27-man squad.

14-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
ITALY

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Gianluigi BUFFON	(34) 28.01.78	Juventus
14	Morgan DE SANCTIS	(35) 26.03.77	Napoli
12	Salvatore SIRIGU	(25) 12.01.87	PSG (Fra)
DEFENDERS			
7	Ignazio ABATE	(25) 12.11.86	Milan
6	Federico BALZARETTI	(30) 06.12.81	Palermo
15	Andrea BARZAGLI	(31) 08.05.81	Juventus
19	Leonardo BONUCCI	(25) 01.05.87	Juventus
3	Giorgio CHIELLINI	(27) 14.08.84	Juventus
2	Christian MAGGIO	(30) 11.02.82	Napoli
4	Angelo OGBONNA	(24) 23.05.88	Torino
MIDFIELDERS			
16	Daniele DE ROSSI	(28) 24.07.83	Roma
22	Alessandro DIAMANTI	(29) 02.05.83	Bologna
13	Emanuele GIACCHERINI	(27) 05.05.85	Juventus
8	Claudio MARCHISIO	(26) 19.01.86	Juventus
18	Riccardo MONTOLIVO	(27) 18.01.85	Fiorentina
5	Thiago MOTTA	(29) 28.08.82	PSG (Fra)
23	Antonio NOCERINO	(27) 09.04.85	Milan
21	Andrea PIRLO	(33) 19.05.79	Juventus
FORWARDS			
9	Mario BALOTELLI	(21) 12.08.90	Manchester City (Eng)
17	Fabio BORINI	(21) 29.03.91	Roma
10	Antonio CASSANO	(29) 12.07.82	Milan
11	Antonio DI NATALE	(34) 13.10.77	Udinese
20	Sebastian GIOVINCO	(25) 26.01.87	Parma
COACH			
Cesare PRANDELLI		(54) 19.08.57	

● Domenico Criscito was omitted from the final squad following his implication in the "Calcioscommesse" match-fixing scandal ... Attacking midfielder Alessandro Diamanti was a surprise inclusion, with no place for Simone Pepe ... Antonio Cassano and Sebastiano Giovinco were preferred in attack to Alessandro Matri, Pablo Osvaldo and Giampaolo Pazzini.

80-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

GOALKEEPERS			
23	David FORDE	(32) 20.12.79	Millwall (Eng)
1	Shay GIVEN	(36) 20.04.76	Aston Villa (Eng)
16	Keiren WESTWOOD	(27) 23.10.84	Sunderland (Eng)
DEFENDERS			
5	Richard DUNNE	(32) 21.09.79	Aston Villa (Eng)
12	Stephen KELLY	(28) 06.09.83	Fulham (Eng)
13	Paul McSHANE	(26) 06.01.86	Hull City (Eng)
18	Darren O'DEA	(25) 04.02.87	Celtic (Sco)
4	John O'SHEA	(31) 30.04.81	Sunderland (Eng)
2	Sean ST LEDGER	(27) 28.12.84	Leicester City (Eng)
3	Stephen WARD	(26) 20.08.85	Wolves (Eng)
MIDFIELDERS			
8	Keith ANDREWS	(31) 13.09.80	West Brom (Eng)
11	Damien DUFF	(33) 02.03.79	Fulham (Eng)
15	Darron GIBSON	(24) 25.10.87	Everton (Eng)
21	Paul GREEN	(29) 10.04.83	unattached
17	Stephen HUNT	(30) 01.08.81	Wolves (Eng)
22	James McCLEAN	(23) 22.04.89	Sunderland (Eng)
7	Aiden McGEADY	(26) 04.04.86	Spartak Moscow (Rus)
6	Glenn WHELAN	(28) 13.01.84	Stoke City (Eng)
FORWARDS			
20	Simon COX	(25) 28.04.87	West Brom (Eng)
9	Kevin DOYLE	(28) 18.08.83	Wolves (Eng)
10	Robbie KEANE	(31) 08.07.80	LA Galaxy (USA)
19	Shane LONG	(25) 22.01.87	West Brom (Eng)
14	Jonathan WALTERS	(28) 20.09.83	Stoke City (Eng)
COACH			
Giovanni TRAPATTONI (Ita)		(73) 17.03.39	

● Wigan Athletic midfielder James McCarthy asked to be left out of the squad after his father was diagnosed with cancer ... Keith Fahey was forced to withdraw after aggrevating a groin problem and he was replaced by former Derby County midfielder Paul Green.

11-4 TO WIN EURO 2012
SPAIN

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Iker CASILLAS	(31) 20.05.81	Real Madrid
23	Pepe REINA	(29) 31.08.82	Liverpool (Eng)
12	Victor VALDES	(30) 14.01.82	Barcelona
DEFENDERS			
18	Jordi ALBA	(23) 21.03.89	Valencia
2	Raul ALBIOL	(26) 04.09.85	Real Madrid
17	Alvaro ARBELOA	(29) 17.01.83	Real Madrid
5	JUANFRAN	(27) 09.01.85	Atletico Madrid
3	Gerard PIQUE	(25) 02.02.87	Barcelona
15	Sergio RAMOS	(26) 30.03.86	Real Madrid
MIDFIELDERS			
14	Xabi ALONSO	(30) 25.11.81	Real Madrid
16	Sergio BUSQUETS	(24) 16.07.87	Barcelona
20	Santi CAZORLA	(27) 13.12.84	Malaga
10	Cesc FABREGAS	(25) 04.05.87	Barcelona
6	Andres INIESTA	(28) 11.05.84	Barcelona
4	Javi MARTINEZ	(23) 02.09.88	Athletic Bilbao
13	Juan MATA	(24) 28.04.88	Chelsea (Eng)
22	Jesus NAVAS	(26) 21.11.85	Sevilla
21	David SILVA	(26) 08.01.86	Manchester City (Eng)
8	XAVI	(32) 25.01.80	Barcelona
FORWARDS			
19	Fernando LLORENTE	(27) 26.02.85	Athletic Bilbao
11	Alvaro NEGREDO	(26) 20.08.85	Sevilla
7	PEDRO	(24) 28.07.87	Barcelona
9	Fernando TORRES	(28) 20.03.84	Chelsea (Eng)
COACH			
Vicente DEL BOSQUE		(61) 23.12.50	

● Defender Carles Puyol misses out after undergoing knee surgery, as does David Villa, who fractured his left tibia during the Club World Cup in December ... Athletic Bilbao's Andoni Iraola injured himself in the Spanish Cup Final three days before the final squad was announced ... Forwards Alvaro Negredo and Pedro were preferred to Iker Muniain and Roberto Soldado.

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10-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
ENGLAND

GOALKEEPERS			
23	Jack BUTLAND	(19) 10.03.93	Birmingham City
13	Robert GREEN	(32) 18.01.80	West Ham United
1	Joe HART	(25) 19.04.87	Manchester City
DEFENDERS			
12	Leighton BAINES	(27) 11.12.84	Everton
5	Gary CAHILL	(26) 19.12.85	Chelsea
3	Ashley COLE	(31) 20.12.80	Chelsea
18	Phil JAGIELKA	(29) 17.08.82	Everton
2	Glen JOHNSON	(27) 23.08.84	Liverpool
14	Phil JONES	(20) 21.02.92	Manchester United
15	Joleon LESCOTT	(29) 16.08.82	Manchester City
6	John TERRY	(31) 07.12.80	Chelsea
MIDFIELDERS			
19	Stewart DOWNING	(27) 22.07.84	Liverpool
4	Steven GERRARD	(32) 30.05.80	Liverpool
8	Frank LAMPARD	(33) 20.06.78	Chelsea
16	James MILNER	(26) 04.01.86	Manchester City
20	Alex OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN	(18) 15.08.93	Arsenal
17	Scott PARKER	(31) 13.10.80	Tottenham Hotspur
7	Theo WALCOTT	(23) 16.03.89	Arsenal
11	Ashley YOUNG	(26) 09.07.85	Manchester United
FORWARDS			
9	Andy CARROLL	(23) 06.01.89	Liverpool
21	Jermain DEFOE	(29) 07.10.82	Tottenham Hotspur
10	Wayne ROONEY	(26) 24.10.85	Manchester United
22	Danny WELBECK	(21) 26.11.90	Manchester United
MANAGER			
Roy HODGSON		(64) 09.08.47	

● Defenders Chris Smalling (groin) and Kyle Walker (ankle), and striker Darren Bent (ankle) were all ruled out before the squad was announced ... goalkeeper John Ruddy withdrew after breaking a finger and was replaced by Jack Butland, while midfielder Gareth Barry was replaced by Phil Jagielka after tearing a muscle in his lower abdomen.

10-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
FRANCE

GOALKEEPERS			
23	Cedric CARRASSO	(30) 30.12.81	Bordeaux
1	Hugo LLORIS	(25) 26.12.86	Lyon
16	Steve MANDANDA	(27) 28.03.85	Marseille
DEFENDERS			
22	Gael CLICHY	(26) 26.07.85	Manchester City (Eng)
2	Mathieu DEBUCHY	(26) 28.07.85	Lille
3	Patrice EVRA	(31) 15.05.81	Man United (Eng)
21	Laurent KOSCIELNY	(26) 10.09.85	Arsenal (Eng)
5	Philippe MEXES	(30) 30.03.82	Milan (Ita)
4	Adil RAMI	(26) 27.12.85	Valencia (Spa)
13	Anthony REVEILLERE	(32) 10.11.79	Lyon
MIDFIELDERS			
6	Yohan CABAYE	(26) 14.01.86	Newcastle United (Eng)
18	Alou DIARRA	(30) 15.07.81	Marseille
15	Florent MALOUDA	(31) 13.06.80	Chelsea (Eng)
19	Marvin MARTIN	(24) 10.01.88	Sochaux
12	Blaise MATUIDI	(25) 09.04.87	Paris Saint-Germain
11	Samir NASRI	(24) 27.06.87	Manchester City (Eng)
7	Franck RIBERY	(29) 07.04.83	Bayern Munich (Ger)
17	Yann M'VILA	(21) 29.06.90	Rennes
FORWARDS			
20	Hatem BEN ARFA	(25) 07.03.87	Newcastle United
10	Karim BENZEMA	(24) 19.12.87	Real Madrid (Spa)
9	Olivier GIROUD	(25) 30.09.86	Montpellier
14	Jeremy MENEZ	(25) 07.05.87	Paris Saint-Germain
8	Mathieu VALBUENA	(27) 28.09.84	Marseille
COACH			
Laurent BLANC		(46) 19.11.65	

● Arsenal right-back Bacary Sagna was ruled out after breaking his right leg in his side's penultimate game of the Premier League season ... Tottenham Hotspur defender Younes Kaboul missed out with a knee injury ... Marseille forward Loic Remy withdrew from the provisonal squad with a thigh injury

66-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
SWEDEN

GOALKEEPERS			
23	Par HANSSON	(25) 22.06.86	Helsingborg
1	Andreas ISAKSSON	(30) 03.10.81	PSV (Hol)
12	Johan WILAND	(31) 24.01.81	Copenhagen (Den)
DEFENDERS			
15	Mikael ANTONSSON	(31) 31.05.81	Bologna (Ita)
4	Andreas GRANQVIST	(27) 16.04.85	Genoa (Ita)
2	Mikael LUSTIG	(25) 13.12.86	Celtic (Sco)
3	Olof MELLBERG	(34) 03.09.77	Olympiakos (Gre)
13	Jonas OLSSON	(29) 10.03.83	West Brom (Eng)
5	Martin OLSSON	(24) 17.05.88	Blackburn Rovers (Eng)
17	Behrang SAFARI	(27) 09.02.85	Anderlecht (Blg)
MIDFIELDERS			
19	Emir BAJRAMI	(24) 07.03.88	Twente (Hol)
6	Rasmus ELM	(24) 17.03.88	AZ (Hol)
18	Samuel HOLMEN	(27) 28.06.84	Istanbul BB (Tur)
9	Kim KALLSTROM	(29) 24.08.82	Lyon (Fra)
7	Sebastian LARSSON	(27) 06.06.85	Sunderland (Eng)
8	Anders SVENSSON	(35) 17.07.76	Elfsborg
16	Pontus WERNBLOOM	(25) 25.06.86	CSKA Moscow (Rus)
21	Christian WILHELMSSON	(32) 08.12.79	Al Hilal (Sau)
FORWARDS			
11	Johan ELMANDER	(31) 27.05.81	Galatasaray (Tur)
14	Tobias HYSEN	(30) 09.03.82	Gothenburg
10	Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC	(30) 03.10.81	Milan (Ita)
22	Markus ROSENBERG	(29) 27.09.82	unattached
20	Ola TOIVONEN	(25) 03.07.86	PSV (Hol)
COACH			
Erik HAMREN		(54) 27.06.57	

● Striker John Guidetti missed out due to an inflamed nerve in a thigh muscle.

50-1 TO WIN EURO 2012
UKRAINE

GOALKEEPERS			
23	Oleksandr HORYAINOV	(36) 29.06.75	Metalist Kharkiv
1	Maksym KOVAL	(19) 09.12.92	Dynamo Kiev
12	Andriy PYATOV	(27) 28.06.84	Shakhtar Donetsk
DEFENDERS			
21	Bohdan BUTKO	(21) 13.01.91	Shakhtar Donetsk
3	Yevhen KHACHERIDI	(24) 28.07.87	Dynamo Kiev
5	Oleksandr KUCHER	(29) 22.10.82	Shakhtar Donetsk
17	Taras MYKHALYK	(28) 28.10.83	Dynamo Kiev
20	Yaroslav RAKYTSKYI	(22) 03.08.89	Shakhtar Donetsk
2	Yevhen SELIN	(24) 09.05.88	Vorskla Poltava
13	Vyacheslav SHEVCHUK	(33) 13.05.79	Shakhtar Donetsk
MIDFIELDERS			
8	Oleksandr ALIYEV	(27) 03.02.85	Dynamo Kiev
6	Denys HARMASH	(22) 19.04.90	Dynamo Kiev
9	Oleg HUSIEV	(29) 25.04.83	Dynamo Kiev
19	Yevhen KONOPLYANKA	(22) 29.09.89	Dnipro
18	Serhiy NAZARENKO	(32) 16.02.80	Tavriya Simferopol
14	Ruslan ROTAN	(30) 29.10.81	Dnipro
4	Anatoliy TYMOSHCHUK	(33) 30.03.79	Bayern Munich (Ger)
FORWARDS			
22	Marko DEVYCH	(28) 27.10.83	Shakhtar Donetsk
15	Artem MILEVSKYI	(27) 12.01.85	Dynamo Kiev
16	Yevhen SELEZNYOV	(26) 20.07.85	Shakhtar Donetsk
7	Andriy SHEVCHENKO	(35) 29.09.76	Dynamo Kiev
10	Andriy VORONIN	(32) 21.07.79	Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
11	Andriy YARMOLENKO	(22) 23.10.89	Dynamo Kiev
COACH			
Oleg BLOKHIN		(59) 05.11.52	

●Oleg Blokhin extended his contract as coach to the end of the 2014 World Cup ... goalkeeper Oleksandr Shovkovskyi was omitted after undergoing surgery for a shoulder injury.

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EURO 2012: the biggest show in town

Euro 2012 is set to be the biggest sports betting event in history with the bookmaking industry expecting around €1billion to be bet on this year's tournament. Passionate, patriotic punters from all over Europe will be hoping to beat the bookies and we've teamed up with leading bookies William Hill to help guide you through the thousands of betting opportunities available at the Euros.

WHO WILL WIN EURO 2012?

The sheer amount of quality teams in the competition means there will be no easy games in Poland and Ukraine, and it'll be arguably a more difficult tournament to win than the World Cup.

Holder...Spain midfielder Xabi Alonso with the trophy after the 2008 Euro Final

11-4 SPAIN
The defending European champions Spain are the favourites with William Hill to defend their crown. Their squad contains many of the players who propelled them to world glory in 2010 in Germany. However, two crucial players will be missing from the Spanish party: Barcelona's David Villa and his club-mate Carles Puyol. The result of their absence has led to their odds drifting to retain their crown.

3-1 GERMANY
Germany are second favourites to win Euro 2012 and have a good chance of at least making it to the Final. They have a young team who play exciting football and when you add this to the Germans' knack of getting to the latter stages of the competition then you have a potent mix. Their second XI's 5-3 defeat to Switzerland isn't enough to put us off and we think the Germans are the team to beat.

13-2 HOLLAND
The Dutch have been one of the most consistent sides in the history of the European Championships. They're always likely to score goals with players such as Arjen Robben and Robin Van Persie in their team, but defensively they can be vulnerable. The other reason for staying away from the team in orange is a possible lack of discipline in the camp – and they do have a poor track record where this is concerned.

10-1 ENGLAND
Everyone thought Harry Redknapp was going to lead England into the European Championship, but the appointment of Roy Hodgson could be a blessing in disguise. Hodgson doesn't play "sexy football", instead he plays sensible football – and he'll make his England team very difficult to break down. We think a trip to the semi-finals is very possible for Roy's boys.

OUTSIDE BETS

20-1 PORTUGAL
The former world player of the year Cristiano Ronaldo had a great season for Real Madrid – bagging an unbelievable 60 goals for the Spanish Champions. His sheer presence in the Portuguese side makes them dangerous outsiders in this year's tournament.

Outsider...Ronaldo

THE OTHER COUNTRIES

10-1 France, 14-1 Italy, 20-1 Russia, 50-1 Ukraine, 50-1 Poland, 50-1 Czech Republic, 50-1 Croatia, 66-1 Sweden, 66-1 Greece, 80-1 Republic of Ireland, 100-1 Denmark.

TOP GOAL SCORER

Ammunition...Carroll

Mario Gomez: The Bayern Munich striker scored 41 goals for his club last season as well as six for Germany during the qualifying campaign. Gomez didn't have a great night in the Champions League Final, but at 7-1 he looks like a good e/w bet for the top tournament goalscorer.

Andy Carroll: The big Geordie took a full season to bed into the Liverpool team, and now looks like a real threat. Carroll should start at least the first two group matches and with Hodgson set to play two wide men – he should have some ammunition to fire in a few Euro goals at 50-1.

HOW TO BET ON THE EUROS

William Hill will be offering up to 280 different markets on each match during the European Championship, and some great special offers during the tournament.

The bookmaker also offers in-play betting – which allows punters to place bets right up until the end of the game.

It's easy to bet with William Hill – in the UK you can bet in over 2,370 shops – while international bettors can access the latest odds from the firm via mobile or online.

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OTHER BETS

TO REACH THE FINAL
5-4 Spain, 6-4 Germany, 5-2 Holland, 9-2 France, 9-2 England, 11-2 Italy, 13-2 Portugal 7-1 Russia, 16-1 Croatia, 16-1 Poland, 16-1 Ukraine, 20-1 Czech Republic, 25-1 Greece, 25-1 Sweden, 25-1 Denmark 33-1 Republic of Ireland.

TEAM TO CONCEDE THE MOST GOALS
9-2 Denmark, 5-1 Ireland, 8-1 Sweden, 9-1 Greece, 9-1 Czech Republic, 10-1 Croatia, 10-1 Ukraine, 12-1 Poland, 16-1 England, 16-1 Italy, 16-1 Russia, 16-1 Portugal, 20-1 France 25-1 Holland, 25-1 Germany, 25-1 Spain.

WINNING NATION/TOP GOALSCORER
Doubles: 14-1 Germany/Mario Gomez, 20-1 Holland/Robin Van Persie, 25-1 Spain/Fernando Torres, 25-1 Spain/Fernando Llorente, 28-1 Germany/Miroslav Klose, 33-1 France/Karim Benzema, 40-1 Portugal/Cristiano Ronaldo, 50-1 Holland/Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, 50-1 Spain/Cesc Fabregas, 50-1 Germany/Lukas Podolski, 66-1 Spain/David Silva, 66-1 England/Wayne Rooney, 66-1 Germany/Thomas Muller.

PLAYER OF THE TOURNAMENT
10-1 Mario Gomez, 12-1 Mesut Ozil, 12-1 David Silva, 14-1 Cristiano Ronaldo, 14-1 Robin Van Persie, 14-1 Andres Iniesta, 16-1 Xavi, 16-1 Fernando Llorente, 20-1 Arjen Robben, 20-1 Bastian Schweinsteiger, 20-1 Fernando Torres, 20-1 Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, 20-1 Thomas Muller, 20-1 Lukas Podolski, 25-1 Karim Benzema 25-1 Wesley Sneijder, 33-1 Franck Ribery, 33-1 Mario Balotelli, 33-1 Samir Nasri, 33-1 Steven Gerrard. Others on request.

Main man...Benzema

CITY WITH MOST GOALS
5-2 Kiev, 11-4 Warsaw, 11-4 Donetsk, 6-1 Gdansk, 12-1 Lviv, 14-1 Kharkiv, 20-1 Poznan, 25-1 Wroclaw.

HOW MANY GAMES WILL GO TO A PENALTY SHOOT-OUT
5-2 None, 5-4 One, 5-2 Two, 13-2 Three.

WILL A HAT-TRICK BE SCORED IN THE TOURNAMENT
EVS Yes, 8-11 No.

BACK YOUR PRIDE AND JOY

The English FA has given its blessing to a bookmaker's £1million giveaway promotion to help parents support their talented sons and daughters to play for the national soccer team.

For details on how to qualify for the offer you can visit www.williamhill.com/playforengland to customise your own £5 free bet certificate.

Former England goalkeeper Chris Kirkland, 31, and his father Eddie, 59, were at the launch as the only pair ever to pull off the remarkable gamble – though when Eddie struck his £100 wager when Chris was just 12 the odds William Hill offered then were just 100-1. Eddie, of Barwell, Leicestershire, was a crane driver in a factory when he placed the bet and was often in straightened circumstances as he scrabbled round for petrol money, and cash for boots, gloves and kit as he took his young son to weekend matches.

WIN

ADIDAS SHIRTS SIGNED BY TOM CLEVERLEY AND EDIN DZEKO

PLUS we've got five Italy puma shirts to give away

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ClubFocus

MONTPELLIER

Money can't buy everything

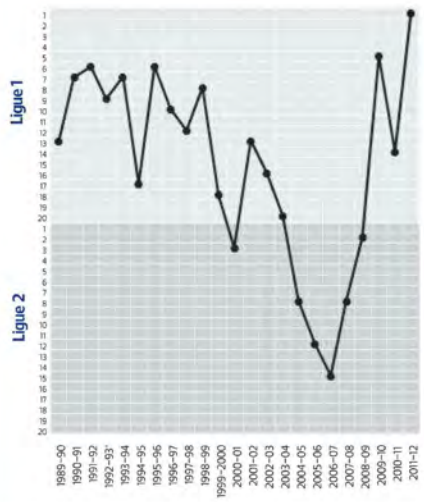
The unfashionable club from the French south coast produced one of this season's biggest upsets. Howard Johnson reports

Last summer all the talk in French football was of Qatari megabucks elevating Paris Saint-Germain to another, frankly stratospheric, level of footballing aristocracy. With seemingly unlimited resources, a high-profile sporting director in the effortlessly urbane Brazilian Leonardo and an equally well-known boss in the well-travelled Italian coach Carlo Ancelotti, the aim behind the investment was always to compete – and ultimately triumph – on the wider European stage. Immediate dominance in Ligue 1 was surely already in the bag; it was nothing more than a stepping stone on the road to greater glories.

But if that was the story, nobody told newly-crowned champions Montpellier.

After a simply unbelievable 38-game season, the Montpellier Herault Sport Club triumphed on the final day of the season with a 2-1 win away to already

MONTPELLIER HSC: LEAGUE POSITIONS 1989 TO 2012



Cup successes (1989 to 2012)
1990 French Cup
1992 French League Cup

Joy...the league champions

* elevated one place after Marseille stripped of title and relegated

Success...fans celebrate with defender Garry Bocaly in Auxerre

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Highly charged...tempers flare during the game against Paris Saint-Germain in February

Handful...Ligue 1's top scorer Giroud causes problems for Lille's defence

> "So long as I'm president, you'll never see a Montpellier player earning €50,000 a week"
>
> Montpellier owner Louis Nicollin

relegated Auxerre. Montpellier only needed a draw to be certain of snatching the title ahead of PSG, and despite going a goal down to an Olivier Kapo strike after 20 minutes, a John Utaka double saw them home with a 2-1 victory.

However, the evening in Burgundy took on a surreal flavour before Montpellier finally clinched the title as home supporters threw countless tennis balls onto the pitch in protest against their own club's poor campaign. The start of the second half was delayed by 10 minutes and further crowd disturbances meant that the game's final 20 minutes were played after all of the day's other matches – including PSG's 2-1 win at Lorient – had finished.

Situated 466 miles south of the capital on the Mediterranean coast, Montpellier might as well be a million miles away in terms of the gap in the club's resources compared to the Parisian aristocrats. While owner Louis Nicollin isn't exactly on his uppers, his financial muscle is dwarfed by that of the Qataris at PSG. But the big man with the even bigger mouth, who likes nothing more than winding up his better-heeled rivals, has loved watching his underdogs become probably the least-fancied outfit ever to claim the French title.

Winning combination

Coached by the unassuming former international midfielder Rene Girard, the combination of the combustible Nicollin and the relaxed, almost avuncular Girard has proved to be a winning one.

Nicollin generates the column inches with his often vulgar and charmless comments – he once made homophobic comments about Lille midfielder Benoit Pedretti when the player was with Auxerre, for example – while Girard simply gets on with the job of getting the absolute best out of his team.

Without making wholesale changes to the squad or spending big money after finishing 14th in the 2010-11 season, the 58-year-old Girard has put together a group of players who have proved themselves to be resilient, hard-working and, above all, seriously talented. Montpellier's supporters – hardly what you would call numerous, with average gates of around 17,500 – have never been so spoiled.

The real shame for those fans, of course, is the likelihood that the team's success will inadvertently lead to its break-up. After their staggering season, a number of Montpellier players are on the radar of Europe's big clubs –

THE POWER CURVE

The movers and shakers at Montpellier

LOUIS NICOLLIN

A huge man with a larger-than-life character, the club president made his money from waste disposal and has frequently been in trouble with the French football authorities for his outrageous statements. In charge since 1974, his passion for the club is unrivalled.

LAURENT NICOLLIN

The 39-year-old son of the president is a less volcanic figure than his father, but he has already been named as his eventual successor and works diligently alongside "papa" as he learns his trade.

MICHEL MEZY

Ex-France midfielder and former Montpellier coach – he led the club to the Ligue 2 title in 1987 – who now acts as Nicollin's right-hand man and advisor.

PHILIPPE PEYBERNES

The man who looks after the club's financial and administrative affairs.

BRUNO CAROTTI

One-time Montpellier captain who joined the backroom staff upon his retirement. Was appointed sporting director in June 2011.

JEAN-FRANCOIS DOMERGUE

Another past Montpellier coach, he was sacked by Nicollin in 2007 but remained at the club and now runs the youth academy.

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Happy days...an open-top bus parade of Montpellier to celebrate the title win

Beam back...fans watch the game away to Auxerre on a giant screen

including Olivier Giroud, Ligue 1's top scorer with 21 goals, skipper Mapou Yanga-Mbiwa, a remarkably mature 23-year-old central defender, and Younes Belhanda, a midfielder who's been praised by none other than Zinedine Zidane.

And perhaps what's most satisfying for the neutral about Montpellier stealing the title from under Parisian noses is the fact that their side is composed of graduates from the club's youth system and players imported at a relatively low cost. Giroud, for example, cost less than £2million when signed from Tours in July of 2010, while Yanga-Mbiwa and Belhanda both came through the ranks and can justifiably lay claim to having been key players in the best team of the club's entire history.

That history dates back to 1919, when Stade Olympique Montpellierain was first formed as a diverse sports club with football, rugby union, athletics, boxing and tennis all catered for. After changing its name to Sports Olympiques Montpellierains, the club enjoyed a first major footballing success in 1929 when beating Sete 2-0 in the Final of the French Cup with a side that featured three brothers who were all Switzerland internationals: Auguste, Edmond and Georges Kramer.

Turning professional in 1932, SOM were one of 20 teams to compete in the first professional division in France, but after bobbing between the first and second tiers for over 30 years, financial difficulties finally forced the club to renounce its professional status in 1969 and play in the amateur third division.

The club's modern era began in November 1974 when the club – now known as Montpellier Littoral Sport Club – merged with Nicollin's Formation Sportive de Nettoiement and the new team took up residence at its current home, the Stade de la Mosson. Just over three years later, with Nicollin installed as president, the club had fought its way back to professional status and a place in Ligue 2. Continuing their remarkable upward trajectory, Montpellier were promoted to Ligue 1 just four years later to complete a remarkable transformation in fortunes for what was now, after yet another name change, the Montpellier Paillade Sport Club Littoral.

The following season proved to be a total disaster, however, and Montpellier finished bottom of the table, scoring the fewest goals and conceding the most. A furious Nicollin watched as his team were also eliminated in the first round of the French Cup before declaring that he never again wanted to live through such a season.

Four campaigns of relative second-tier obscurity led to Nicollin declaring at the start of the 1986-87 campaign that if Montpellier weren't promoted he was off. The side – which featured Cameroon striker Roger Milla alongside 20-year-old attacking midfielder Laurent Blanc – responded positively and were promoted as champions.

Renamed once more

After being once more renamed as Montpellier Herault Sport Club in 1989, the club embarked on the most successful period yet in its history, becoming a regular in the top flight, qualifying for European football, signing big names stars such as Colombia's Carlos Valderrama and winning the 1990 French Cup with one Eric Cantona in the side.

But Montpellier's position as a team to be reckoned with didn't last and they were relegated in 2000, starting a period in which they yo-yoed between divisions one and two until finally securing top-flight status in 2009 under the controversial coach Rolland Courbis.

With the threat of jail hanging over him following his conviction for being involved in a number of fraudulent transfers during his time in charge of Marseille between 1997 and 1999, Courbis resigned before the start of the 2009-10 campaign and was imprisoned in September of 2009.

Bringing in Girard to replace Courbis was something of a curveball move for Nicollin. Courbis was fiery and outspoken, while Girard was quiet and thoughtful. But the new man, who had spent much of his coaching career in the background at the French Football Federation, proved to be an inspired choice, leading Montpellier to a fifth-place finish in their first season back and snagging European football into the bargain.

It's true that Girard's second term didn't see the club hit such giddy heights and the side did seem to run out

PROFIT AND LOSS

With an annual budget of around €33million (£29m), only the 13th biggest in the French first division, Montpellier have had to cut their cloth accordingly.

The club was recorded by the DNCG, French football's financial watchdog, as having made a modest loss of €400,000 (£320,000) in the 2009-10 season.

So Montpellier will have no problem complying with UEFA's financial fairplay regulations, whereby clubs must only spend what they earn, within a limit of €45m over three years.

A much more pressing financial problem for Montpellier president Louis Nicollin will be keeping hold of his newly decorated players amid bids from wealthier rivals. "So long as I'm president, you'll never see a Montpellier player earning €50,000 (£42,000) a week," Nicollin said recently.

Olivier Giroud is believed to be the club's top earner, on around €18,000 (£15,000) a week.

ANNUAL BUDGET

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of gas in the latter part of the season as they finished in 14th place. But the team did achieve some success, reaching the French League Cup Final, where they narrowly lost to Marseille by a solitary goal.

Even though Girard's reputation had been enhanced by two decent seasons at the helm, it's fair to say that no one expected Montpellier's next campaign to take off in such spectacular style.

Increasing maturity

Maybe it was the increasing maturity of a number of key elements of Girard's team that allowed Montpellier to grow wings. Belhanda, Yanga-Mbiwa and midfielder Remy Cabella all turned 22 during the season. Plus there were the astute signings of veteran Brazilian defender Hilton, a player who seemed to inspire confidence right the way through the defence, and

Main man...Giroud with the league trophy

Nigeria striker John Utaka, a wily old fox who brought out the best in Giroud. Strong and athletic, with a surprisingly delicate touch for a big man, Giroud was the revelation of the French season, with his goals turning what in the previous campaign would have been draws into wins on any number of occasions.

It wasn't plain sailing all the way to the title though, especially with PSG breathing down their necks. There were a few hiccups along the way, not least a disappointing 2-2 draw at home to Evian four games from the end of the season. It looked like the pressure was beginning to get to Girard's men, but they dug deep, rode out the storm and finally clinched their first Ligue 1 title. And it was no less than they deserved after a massive collective effort.

While it is as yet impossible to say what shape Montpellier's 2012-13 title-defending side will take, but whether the team stays together or breaks up, no one should forget their remarkable achievement in becoming French champions. Least of all PSG. WS

THE SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS

Geoffrey JOURDREN

Age 26 (04.02.86)
Montpellier's first-choice keeper is under 6ft tall but turned in some inspirational performances this season and kept more than 10 clean sheets. He has stated that he wants to stay at the club for life.

Jonathan LIGALI

Age 21 (28.05.91)
A France under-20 international who signed his first professional contract with Montpellier in 2010.

Laurent PIONNIER

Age 30 (24.05.82)
A one-club man who's been a reserve since returning in 2008 following a loan spell at Libourne-Saint-Seurin. Played in the 2011 League Cup Final against Marseille.

DEFENDERS

Henri BEDIMO (Cam)

Age 28 (04.06.84)
A Cameroon international who's done the rounds in France, playing for four other clubs before signing for Montpellier from Lens in June of 2011 after the northern club were relegated from the top flight. Has made the left-back slot his own.

Garry BOCALY

Age 24 (19.04.88)
Right-back who never quite made the grade at Marseille before being loaned to Montpellier in 2008. A second loan spell in 2010 saw him sign a full contract with the club at the end of the season and he has since established himself as a regular choice.

Mathieu DEPLAGNE

Age 20 (01.10.91)
The son of Dominique Deplagne, who won the second division title with Montpellier in 1981 and now coaches the club's goalkeepers.

MIDFIELDERS

Younes BELHANDA (Mor)

Age 22 (25.02.90)
A former sweeper turned midfield playmaker who president Nicollin insists is an even better player than France's highly-rated Eden Hazard. Despite being born in France, Belhanda opted to represent Morocco, his parents' country.

Remy CABELLA

Age 22 (08.03.90)
The Corsican, who has an Italian father, was a key performer this season after spending last term on loan at Arles-Avignon. His performances were so impressive that he was nominated for the French PFA's young player of the year award.

Marco ESTRADA (Chl)

Age 29 (28.05.83)
Signed from Universidad de Chile after the 2010 World Cup despite only appearing in one match at the tournament – and getting himself sent off after appearing as a substitute. Acts as the wise older head alongside the younger midfield talent.

FORWARDS

Karim AIT FANA

Age 23 (25.02.89)
The club's main striker when they made it to the top flight in 2009, he was tipped to make a big impression but his progress has been hampered in the last couple of seasons by serious injury. Capped by France at under-21 level he has been sounded out by Morocco.

Souleymane CAMARA (Sen)

Age 29 (22.12.82)
Senegal international who isn't a prolific goalscorer, but his all-round intelligent play is a huge plus for Montpellier and he was Girard's preferred choice to partner Giroud and Utaka as part of an attack-minded front three.

Geoffrey DERNIS

Age 31 (24.12.80)
With previous experience at Lille and Saint-Etienne, he hasn't been an unqualified success on the French south coast, but he did chip in with some important goals when coming off the bench this season.

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THE STADIUM

STADE DE LA MOSSON (capacity 32,900)

Although they play in an impressive stadium, Montpellier have trouble filling the ground in a city that has traditionally been a rugby stronghold. Opened in 1972 and owned by the city council, Montpellier first took up residence at La Mosson in 1974 and have been tenants ever since. The ground has seen a number of structural improvements over the years and was considered good enough to host six games during the 1998 World Cup. Average home crowds still hover just under the 20,000 mark, despite the club's remarkable success since returning to the French top flight in 2009.

THE KIT

Home kit Second kit

Abdel EL KAOUTARI (Mor)

Age 22 (17.03.90)
Central defender who was born in Montpellier and capped by France at under-19 level, but then opted to play for Morocco and was selected for the 2012 African Nations Cup squad. Lost his place this season following the arrival of Hilton.

HILTON (Bra)

Age 34 (13.09.77)
Veteran central defender who couldn't wait to join Montpellier from Marseille last August after falling down the pecking order at the Velodrome and enduring a violent robbery at his home. His experience and know-how brought real stability to the defence.

Cyril JEUNECHAMP

Age 36 (18.12.75)
Has made over 400 league appearances for six different French clubs. Arrived at Montpellier in 2009 after a falling out with his coach at Nice. Found his playing time limited this season as the years began to catch up with him.

Benjamin STAMBOULI

Age 21 (13.08.90)
The son of Henri Stambouli, who runs the Marseille academy, and nephew of former Monaco coach Laurent Banide. A central defender who can also operate as a defensive midfielder, he had the physical and mental strength to play over 30 matches this season.

Mapou YANGA-MBIWA

Age 23 (15.05.89)
Uncapped central defender who was named in *Les Bleus*' 26-man preliminary squad for Euro 2012. He arrived in France from his native Central African Republic aged eight and has been a first-team regular for his only professional club since the age of 18.

Gregory LACOMBE

Age 30 (11.01.82)
Long-serving attacking midfielder who was loaned to Monaco – the club where he started his career – during the 2010-11 season, but returned to Montpellier after they were relegated from Ligue 1.

Joris MARVEAUX

Age 29 (15.08.82)
The older brother of Newcastle United's Sylvain Marvaux, he joined from Clermont in 2008 and was a key player as the club earned promotion in 2009. Despite no longer being an automatic first choice, he still remains an important member of the squad.

Romain PITAU

Age 34 (08.08.77)
The veteran was signed in 2009 after making over 170 league appearances for Sochaux. Didn't feature regularly this season, but his highly professional attitude and vast experience mean he is a valued member of the squad.

Jamel SAIHI (Tun)

Age 25 (27.01.87)
Born in Montpellier, but a Tunisia international through his family roots. Has made over 100 appearances for the club but has not been a regular starter of late.

Jonathan TINHAN

Age 23 (01.06.89)
Joined from Grenoble last year but has yet to make an impression. Born in France, he was sounded out at international level by Benin because of his family connections, but turned down the opportunity to represent the African nation.

Olivier GIROUD

Age 25 (30.09.86)
Arguably Ligue 1's most dangerous striker, he joined Montpellier from Tours in 2010 and delivered strong performances and important goals, earning not only a full international call-up but also plenty of interest from Europe's big boys.

Bengali-Fode KOITA

Age 21 (21.10.90)
France under-21 international who was loaned to second division Lens this year in order to gain more game time and experience.

John UTAKA (Nga)

Age 30 (08.01.82)
Nigeria international who sandwiched four seasons in England with Portsmouth between two stays in France. Having played for both Lens and Rennes in his first stint, he joined Montpellier in 2011 and has brought real know-how and quality to the club.

THE COACH

Rene GIRARD

Age 58 (04.04.54)
A former France midfielder who went on to become Roger Lemerre's assistant when *Les Bleus* won Euro 2000. He took over at Montpellier in June of 2009, replacing the colourful Rolland Courbis who had just overseen promotion to the top flight. He built on that momentum by leading Montpellier to a creditable fifth place and last term took them to the League Cup Final.

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Facetoface

MARK VAN BOMMEL

"Because we are a small country we have to think, to be technical, otherwise we can never beat the bigger countries"

The Holland midfielder is returning home and rejoining PSV Eindhoven after this summer's European Championship

Most people would suggest that Holland are one of the favourites to win the European Championship. Is that the way that you see it?
We played well in the qualifying rounds and were runners-up in the World Cup, so it's normal that we're among the favourites. But there are also some serious outsiders, like England, Italy, France...

What do you think about your group – the one that is being called the "Group Of Death"?
Holland are always in the "Group of Death" but, yeah, this is a very tough group. You might say that at least we don't have to start against Germany, but we start against Denmark and that will be hard. We've also got Portugal in our group. At these tournaments it is always very important to win the first game.

How do you answer those critics who might complain that the current Holland side is not as exciting as those in years gone by?
Our problem in recent times is that, while we have had some terrific players up front, we have conceded goals too easily, so under [Van Bommel's father-in-law, Bert] Van Marwjik we have put some balance into the team. Normally Dutch sides just play an attacking game, they run and run, they get a goal and then they lose. Now we are much more solid, we are playing as a team. The front men work like they never did before and that's why we got to the Final in South Africa. This isn't the way people expect the Dutch to play. Maybe we don't play spectacularly, but we're not bad. We also have a very strong squad. We have seven or eight players for four places up front, guys who if they had a different nationality would be guaranteed a team place: Huntelaar, Van Persie, Robben, Kuyt, Sneijder, Van der Vaart, Affelay, De Jong and others.

How do you explain the seemingly endless supply of world-class players that Holland produces?
Because we are a small country we have to think, to be technical, otherwise we can never beat the bigger countries. Everyone can train hard and, of course, you have to be fit, but the technical aspect is even more important.

You were living in Italy and playing your football with Milan this season. How do you see Cesare Prandelli's team doing?
Italy played well in their qualifying group. It might have looked a weak one on paper, but you have to go out there and do it. They have a good squad and some good young players. Although I don't know the coach Prandelli, all the Italian guys say he is a very good coach.

You mentioned the World Cup Final in South Africa. Does the defeat by Spain still hurt or do you feel you lost to the better team?
We could have won the World Cup Final, we had the first big chance of the game through [Arjen] Robben. It was a close game, it wasn't a nice game of pretty football – but then which Final is? In the end, they won, we didn't.

You have played at the highest level in Spain (Barcelona), Germany (Bayern Munich) and Italy (Milan). Can you compare the experiences?
The weather is the biggest difference. Barcelona is one of the most fantastic cities in the world. You are on the sea, yet you have the mountains close by, the food is fantastic and the club is really good. I had a very nice time at Munich, my family was well there but I had an argument with the coach [Louis Van Gaal] and I had to leave.

And what about Italy...
Italians know everything. It is much easier in some ways because the people are so passionate about football. When you hear people raising their voices in the street you think what's this, and you get close and you realise that they're talking about football.

Is the lack of privacy for a big-name player like yourself a problem in Italy?
Privacy is not a problem for me because I'm always at home. Training is often at 12pm which is perfect. I drop the kids at school, go into Milan to have my breakfast, go training, and by 3.30pm I'm back home. I'm always at home, I'm not often in the city.

You are 35 years old now and have signed a one-year deal with PSV. What are your plans after that?
I definitely want to coach at the top level. In Holland you have to have four licenses to coach and I already have two. I like the idea of trying to blend different characters, to make them into a team. Let me explain. I used to think everybody wanted to be treated the way I like to be treated. When I make a mistake I get mad if someone shouts at me for the mistake and that makes me want to try harder. But it is not that way with everyone. One day in training with [Dennis] Rommedahl, I pushed him a lot, shouted at him and I could see that he just got worse. I talked to him about it and asked him if he objected to me shouting at him. He said he didn't like it; he preferred to hear positive things. So the next time he played a bad ball, I shouted at him: "Come On, Dennis, next time you can do better" – and he got better. That made me think that coaching really is a mental game, a psychology, and the best trainers have to know how every player is functioning.

Interview by Paddy Agnew

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On the pitfalls of television punditry...

"If you do it immediately after your career you have to say hard things about guys with whom you were playing just months before"

Mark Van Bommel wears the new adidas Predator Lethal Zones boots which have five super-light (SL) rubber and memory foam 3-D zones, each designed to support perfect ball control. Visit www.adidas.com/football for more info

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Facetoface

ALEJANDRO SABELLA

"National teams feed off the clubs, which is why the clubs are so important"

Having won the Libertadores Cup as a club coach with Estudiantes, Argentina's national boss is now looking for success on a bigger stage

The World Cup qualifiers in South America are played over a period of almost three years. How do you feel about this?
The calendar is so tight that it has to be extended but, in general terms, it's not the best thing. Players can lose their form. But then a young player can emerge who, in a shorter campaign, would not get the time to come through. It's all relative.

You played in England, for Sheffield United and Leeds United. Is it hard to adapt to another country and be expected to perform to your best ability right away?
Adapting involves several factors. First, the human, social aspect and then that which is specific to the game. Football is now global, but in other eras English football was not the same as German, Italian, Spanish. There were quite a few differences. The English game was more in the air, bypassing the middle, the German was played on the ground, the Italian very tactical, Spanish more open. Maybe, more than the system, it's about the players' mentality. I always refer to the case of [former Argentina forward Ariel] Ortega. He was the player in the post-Maradona era who least felt the burden of wearing the no10 shirt because for him it was the same to play in front of 60,000 people as two. He didn't feel pressure.

But Ortega had mixed experiences playing abroad...
Maybe on the human side he missed the microclimate, that support an Argentinian player can get from fans and family. They are players who were big idols at their clubs and for whom it's also harder to play in a different type of football.

How do you view the global game these days?
Football has levelled out in how it's played, but there are still small differentiating characteristics. Technique has always been the base. Goals come in many different ways: from a dead ball, an individual play, a mistake. What you try to do is strengthen a team in all areas, try not to deprive players of their freedom to see if they can tip the balance with their skill, try to surprise opponents and create numerical superiority. If you're beaten to 50-50 balls there's a problem which could be that the team are not properly set out on the pitch. It could be a tactical problem or a mental problem – that your opponents are more concentrated than you, they read the move better, they have a better attitude. It could even be a physical problem – they get to the ball quicker than you because they're faster.

In a globalised world, is there a danger of countries like Argentina losing their footballing identity?
Today the *potrero* [an area where boys would gather to play football and hone their skills] does not exist in the way it used to in Argentina. When I was a kid you could play in the street; today you can't because you've got to keep your eyes open all the time for cars, so I think we've lost the *potrero*. In general terms, it's the same in other countries, that way we had of playing. Now it's different, there are football schools, they play it in colleges, private clubs. The huge amount of Africans there are in Europe for example, or Spaniards in England; the internal make-up of each country has changed.

Is there a danger that national teams might one day disappear?
That's a difficult subject. There's often talk of creating a super league with the most powerful teams in Europe. I couldn't go into that subject in depth. Obviously, national teams feed off the clubs, which is why the clubs are so important. I think that in everything there has to be a balance, especially among us Argentinians. We are so changeable, we go from one extreme to another: sometimes thinking the national team is priority number one and later that you have to put the clubs first.

Will you be watching Euro 2012?
We have a friendly with Germany in August so I'll obviously watch the Euros. Without having a deep knowledge, I think the two teams that are a bit above the rest are Germany and Spain. Spain, we already know are world champions, with great players at Barcelona and Real Madrid and some in England. Germany have many young players who already appeared at the last World Cup. Germany are in very good shape.

What about England?
A problem that happened to countries in Europe, I think, was the large number of foreigners weakening the national teams by making it difficult for young players to emerge and play in the first division. In that sense England had a lot of difficulty with generational change, although they are gradually doing it because they've always been a power. In the World Cups they've always lost to the champions or runners-up, and they were often eliminated on penalties, so they're always there. That didn't happen at the last World Cup, if I remember rightly, because they had a goal disallowed when the ball was a metre over the line.

How disappointed were you that Argentina failed to qualify for this summer's Olympic tournament?
As an assistant coach I was at an Olympics [in 1996] and, after a World Cup, it's a top competition, the same as the World Cup qualifiers. International competitions are always useful, to see players, discover new ones and build a squad.

Interview by Rex Gowar

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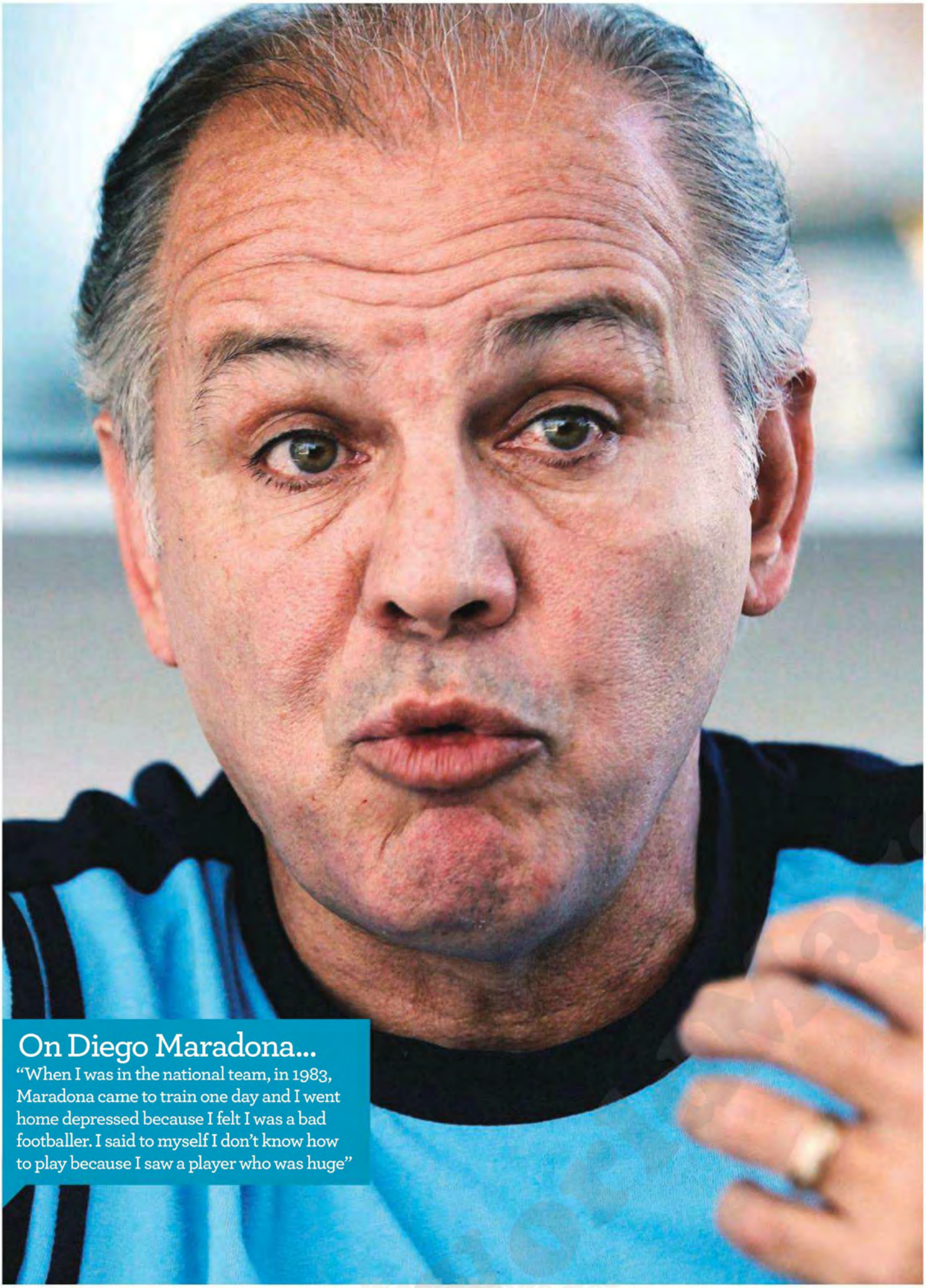

On Diego Maradona...

"When I was in the national team, in 1983, Maradona came to train one day and I went home depressed because I felt I was a bad footballer. I said to myself I don't know how to play because I saw a player who was huge"

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Wide boys with connections

Wingers and full-backs are often the key to success but their central midfield links are crucial, says Jonathan Wilson

A football team is a holistic entity. Nothing exists independently of anything else; a change in one part of the pitch can have a profound impact elsewhere. It can often appear that the key contest in a game is between a vaunted wide man and an attacking full-back, but often the battle on the flank ends up being either a sideshow or a function of what is going on elsewhere on the pitch.

The full-back versus winger interaction is fascinating because there is no "right" way to approach it. Everything is relative. When Real Madrid beat Manchester United 3-1 in the first leg of the Champions League quarter-final in 2003, for instance, Roberto Carlos played as though David Beckham didn't exist, constantly surging past him. Beckham was a diligent wide midfielder, but his lack of pace meant he couldn't track the Brazilian without starting deeper, and he had clear instructions to start high up the pitch, presumably to try to discourage Roberto Carlos from getting forward as he did.

This was a classic example of the trait that Jack Charlton highlighted after the 1994 World Cup, noting that, tactically, full-back had become the most important position on the pitch. His point was that when 4-4-2 meets 4-4-2, or when one side plays narrow, the full-backs are the only players with space in front of them and they are the only players who can realistically expect to be moving at pace when engaging an opponent. Beckham couldn't cope with Roberto Carlos by sitting deep because Madrid's left-back would already have accelerated by the time he met him. The logic therefore said that he should play high. But Roberto Carlos ignored him, leaving Beckham a lonely figure waiting for a pass that never came. United would probably have been better off either with Beckham sitting very deep, almost as an auxiliary right-back in front of Gary Neville, or sacrificing Beckham for a pacier player.

But that doesn't mean that when facing an attacking full-back retreat is always the best policy. In a World Cup qualifier in Zagreb in 2008, for instance, England manager Fabio Capello's response to the threat of Danijel Pranjic, whose link up on Croatia's left flank with Ivan Rakitic had looked so potent, was to play Theo Walcott high on the England right. Pranjic ignored him, as Roberto Carlos had ignored Beckham, but found that when England worked the ball behind him, Walcott's pace was such that he couldn't recover. Walcott scored a hat-trick as England won 4-1 and became the first side to beat Croatia in a competitive game at the Maksimir.

This season's Manchester derby at City's Etihad Stadium offered a similar winger-on-full-back narrative. Nani had torn Gael Clichy apart in one particular game between Manchester United and Arsenal and it was, presumably, memories of that which prompted Alex Ferguson to prefer the Portuguese winger to Antonio Valencia, who had been in superb form over the past few months, against City. As it turned out, Nani was a peripheral figure and Clichy not only handled him comfortably from a defensive point of view but also went charging past him to link up with the midfield on a couple of occasions.

Challenge...Bosingwa (left) keeps close to Ribery

> After the 1994 World Cup, Jack Charlton noted full-back was the most important position on the pitch

Individual battles

This season's Champions League semi-final between Real Madrid and Bayern Munich looked as though it would feature two similar battles on the Madrid left, where Cristiano Ronaldo was taking on Phillip Lahm, and Arjen Robben was up against Fabio Coentrao in the first leg and Marcelo in the second. Because neither winger tracks back, these were individual battles.

In the first game, in Munich, Coentrao had a dismal time, left isolated as Lahm was able to get forward to

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Tussle...Ronaldo (left) and Lahm

support Robben, and it was precisely that overlap that led to Bayern's second goal. In the second leg, Bayern, while on the back foot, were able to contain Ronaldo and Marcelo relatively comfortably. This was largely because Lahm got forward to support Robben occasionally while Marcelo was rarely able to link up with Ronaldo.

So what exactly was happening in these four games?

In Munich, Bayern controlled midfield despite Bastian Schweinsteiger having a poor game by his standards. Toni Kroos – a far more intelligent and adaptable footballer than Thomas Muller, whose place he effectively took – dropped deep from a position behind Mario Gomes to link with Schweinsteiger and Luiz Gustavo, effectively giving Bayern an extra half man than Madrid, for whom Mesut Ozil – Kroos' counterpart in the respective 4-2-3-1s – remained high. That gave Bayern control of the centre, which they capitalised on by driving Xabi Alonso and Sami Khedira deeper and deeper, never giving either time on the ball. That encouraged Lahm to push up the pitch, which in turn enhanced their control of midfield.

Chelsea's response in the Champions League Final was simply to cede midfield to Bayern

Defensive role

Chelsea's response in the Final was simply to cede midfield. They attempted to frustrate Bayern's full-backs by lining up a double curtain in front of them: Ryan Bertrand operating as an auxiliary left-back in front of Ashley Cole, while Salomon Kalou played in a more defensive role than usual, supporting Jose Bosingwa.

On the left the policy was a success, with Phillip Lahm rarely getting forward to support Arjen Robben – which perhaps explains why Robben so often cut inside and shot from range. On the right, Bosingwa struggled at times with Diego Contento overlapping and it was from that flank that both the Bayern goal and the penalty stemmed. Bayern still dominated, and it would be absurd to suggest a team that ceded 35 chances wasn't fortunate in some way. But, equally, Petr Cech only had to make two saves, which suggests that Chelsea, up to a point, at least restricted the type of chance Bayern created.

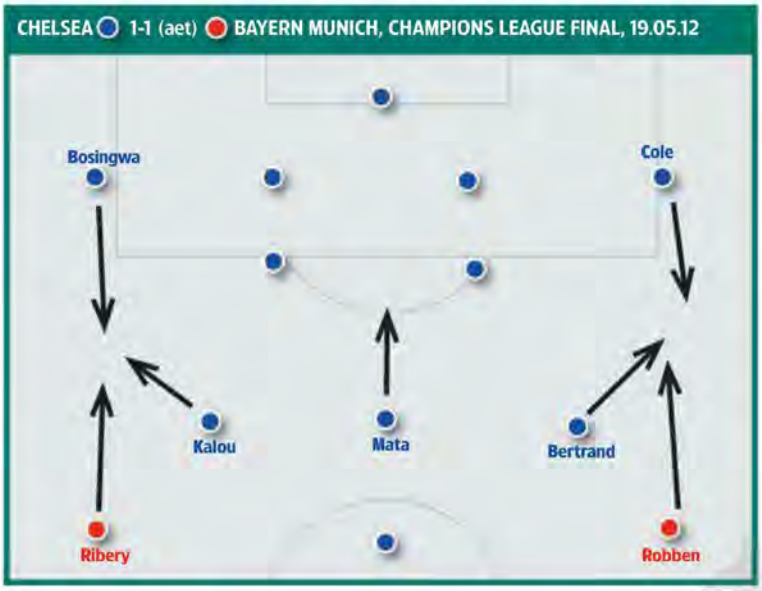
At the Etihad, the issue was less tactical than physical. United's midfield three of Michael Carrick, Paul Scholes and Park Ji-sung were simply overwhelmed by the power and drive of Gareth Barry and Yaya Toure, supported by the occasional retreat of David Silva, Carlos Tevez or Samir Nasri. That meant that the isolated figure was not the full-back, but rather the winger, which explains why Pablo Zabaleta had such success driving past Ryan Giggs.

The Bernabeu in 2003 offers a similar lesson, as United's midfield three of Roy Keane, Nicky Butt and Paul Scholes found themselves pinned back by Luis Figo, Zinedine Zidane and Flavio Conceicao, making Beckham merely an adornment as Roberto Carlos effectively joined Claude Makelele in ball-winning.

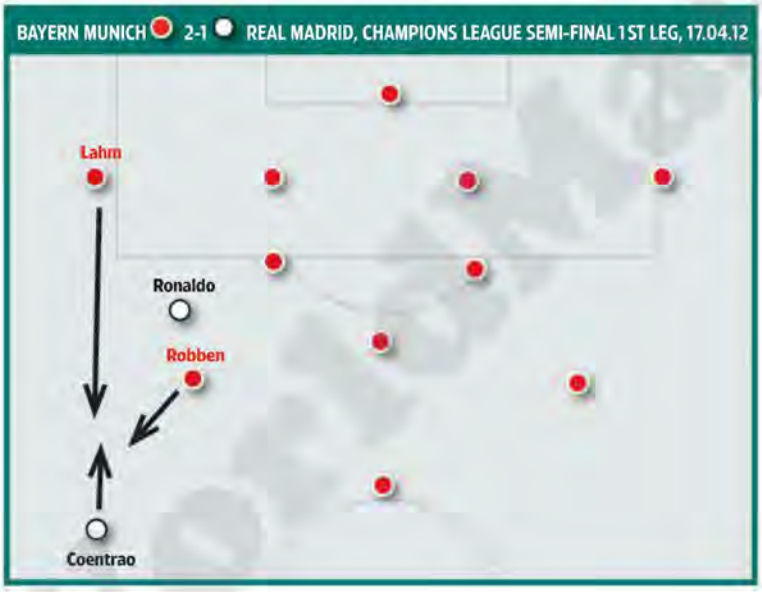
In the Maksimir in 2008, it was more that England sat deep, defending territory, and then picked out Walcott with long through-passes.

In all four games what happened on the flank was conditioned by what happened in the middle and, in at least two of the cases, control of the centre brought control of the flank, which in turn enhanced control of the centre.

In football everything is connected and everything is relative. WS



Support...Kalou and Bertrand helped Chelsea's full-backs cope with the wide threat of Bayern's Ribery and Robben



Failure...when Ronaldo did not track back, Coentrao was exposed when Lahm joined Robben in attack

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6 of the best

Libertadores Cup stars

Tim Vickery selects the best performers from the early stages of this season's competition

1 Sebastian JAIME

Union Espanola (Chl)

One of the themes of recent Libertadores has been the success of Argentinian players who had been overlooked at home – and that was continued in 2012 by two strikers with Union Espanola. But while centre-forward Emanuel Herrera may have been the Chilean side's cutting edge with five goals, even more impressive for one of this year's surprise sides was the contribution of 25-year-old Jaime.

With coach Jose Luis Sierra going with a front three, Jaime began the campaign on the right flank before switching to the left once Sierra had seen the value of left-footed Fernando Cordero cutting in from that side.

If Cordero was in the team to supply the crosses and Herrera there to finish, Jaime did both. A winger and a penalty area predator, he scored three times in the competition, proving himself to be quick and dynamic outside the box, yet dangerous in the air and on the ground in sight of goal.

He also shone brightest at the most important moments. Union Espanola were expected to fall to Tigres of Mexico in the qualifying round, but Jaime came up with an excellent cross for Gonzalo Barriga to score in the first leg, and then clinched his side's place in the group phase with a fine header as Barriga returned the favour in the second leg. Jaime was also on target with smart finishes in both legs of the knockout round when Union went down fighting against Argentina's Boca Juniors.

Jaime played only a single top-flight game for Argentinos Juniors in 2009 before kick-starting his career the following year with La Serena in Chile. He then moved to the capital to join Union Espanola in 2011, and this year's Libertadores will surely have given him a more prominent place in the shop window.

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2 Leandro DAMIAO

Internacional (Bra)

Although he came off the bench to score a vital goal in the Final of the 2010 Libertadores, Damiao was only a bit-part player that year for Inter. He didn't really make his name until last term, when a flurry of goals put him into contention for Brazil's no9 shirt.

The news from the 2012 Libertadores is that his form last season was no fluke and he found the target six times before Inter were narrowly beaten by their compatriots Fluminense.

Even more encouraging was the evidence of his all-round improvement as a player. Very much a finisher, he was proficient in the air and with both feet but not especially comfortable linking the play. This year, however, his back-to-goal game has shown massive improvement and a highlight of the competition for Inter was the relationship he formed with attacking midfielder Oscar.

The quick, skilful exchanges between the pair give rise to the hope that the duo could form an important part of Brazil's Olympic side.

3 Fidel MARTINEZ

Deportivo Quito (Ecu)

Martinez was a member of the Ecuador team that won the 2007 Pan-American Games gold medal in Rio de Janeiro. Cruzeiro of Belo Horizonte liked what they saw and kept him in Brazil but the move did not work out and, in 2010, he went home and joined Deportivo, taking with him a Brazilian box of tricks.

Martinez proved to be a key player in last year's domestic title-winning campaign. Deportivo's first option in the Libertadores was always to play the ball out wide to him on the left flank, where he was capable of tearing defences apart.

Given space he could surge past his man with sustained pace and a burst of acceleration; marked tightly he could roll his man or free a team-mate with a cleverly angled pass. He was most effective pulling back left-footed crosses for advancing team-mates – he played a huge part in Matias Alustiza's eight goals – but could also get into the box and score himself.

The last of his three goals in the campaign was the clear highlight, racing on from the halfway line against Universidad de Chile to blast in an unstoppable left-footed shot. In celebration of that goal, Alustiza pretended to be a photographer taking a shot of Martinez – and European scouts would be well advised to keep him in their sights.

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4 Juan Fernando QUINTERO

Atletico Nacional (Col)

Envigado, a club from the Medellin suburbs, have an enviable record in grooming promising players and then selling them on, often to local giants Atletico Nacional – and 19-year-old midfielder Quintero is the latest to tread that path.

With such a deep squad there was initially no place in the starting line-up for the teenager, but he was frequently the first option off the bench. He caught the eye with his left-footed passing and his constant movement gave fluidity to the team's play.

Perhaps his finest hour came in the first leg of the fatal knockout tie against Velez Sarsfield. Nacional were a goal down and struggling when Quintero was introduced on the half hour. Although he could do nothing about the scoreline he was hugely impressive and came closest to an equaliser when his free-kick was tipped round the post.

5 Damian LIZIO

Bolivar (Bol)

It all ended in tears with an 8-0 thrashing at the hands of reigning champions Santos, but there was still much to celebrate as Bolivar became the first Bolivian side in 12 years to make it out of the group stage.

And the most eye-catching element of the team was their Argentinian midfielder Lizio.

Once of River Plate, Lizio made just three first-team appearances in three years for the club, but things picked up with a spell with Anorthosis Famagusta in Cyprus, where he teamed up with Argentinian coach Angel Guillermo Hoyos. With his skill and capacity to pass and move at speed, Lizio impressed, and when the coach took over at Bolivar he brought the player across the Atlantic with him.

He combined well with winger Juan Carlos Arce and was responsible for the high point of the club's campaign – a lob volley against Universidad Catolica which confirmed Bolivar's place in the knockout round and will live on in the memories of the fans long after memories of the thrashing by Santos have faded.

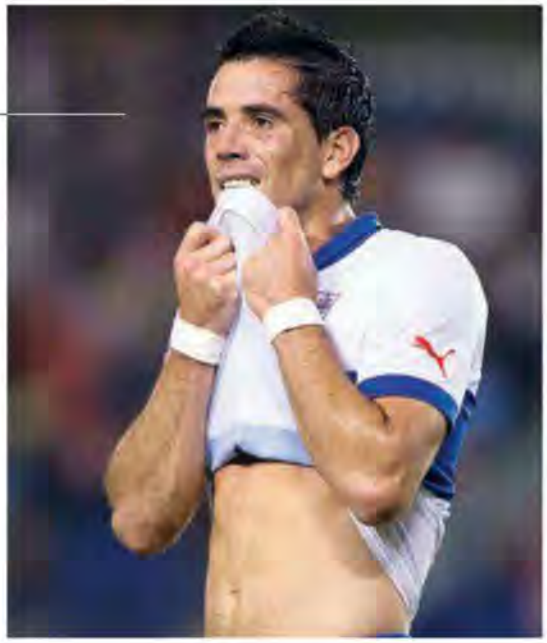
6 Felipe GUTIERREZ

Universidad Catolica (Chl)

Quarter-finalists last year, Universidad Catolica had the attacking talent to dream of something better in 2012. Group phase elimination, then, was a bitter disappointment. But the failure was collective rather than individual, essentially the failure of coach Mario Lepe to find a blend. Systems were changed, personnel switched but no one enhanced their reputation – with the exception of playmaker Gutierrez.

Before the campaign there were concerns that the 21-year-old might lack the mental strength for the task ahead. In the event, though, he was consistently the best thing about Catolica. Whether used in a central role or on the left, he was a supply line for the strikers and a goal threat as well. He scored both goals against Junior of Colombia, and set up both in the win over Union Espanola. Even in the defeat away to Bolivar he was at the hub of all of the team's best moments.

Despite the pain of an early exit, Gutierrez can look back on the 2012 Libertadores with some pleasure. It represents continued development in a career that began in 2009, experienced a breakthrough in 2010, and was consolidated in 2011. He has shown this year that he has quality and it will be interesting to see now what he can produce in a better collective context.



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THE INSIDER

The expert view on events off the pitch

Another "Blatterism" on penalty shoot-outs

But Beckenbauer is quite happy with the status quo

Spot on...Bayern Munich goalkeeper Manuel Neuer beats Chelsea's Petr Cech during the Champions League Final shoot-out

Bayern Munich's Champions League Final defeat by Chelsea might have made Franz Beckenbauer wonder about the use of penalty shoot-outs. He even had the issue thrown at him by FIFA president Sepp Blatter during Congress in Budapest.

Blatter, reviewing the agenda, suggested that shoot-outs were a "tragedy" for the losers and that perhaps Beckenbauer's committee could devise a better solution.

This was a characteristic "Blatterism" – a throwaway, off-the-cuff remark which accrued greater status than it deserved merely because it came from the president of FIFA.

Beckenbauer's committee – the Task Force Football 2014 – is a line-up of former star players which has been entrusted by Blatter with generating ideas about how to improve the quality of the finals in Brazil after much of the dire football thrown up in South Africa.

Such is the technological capability of modern media that, by the time FIFA delegates had returned from a coffee break, reports had been published all around the world suggesting that Blatter had told Beckenbauer formally to come up with answers.

Blatter then had to preface the resumption of Congress business with a statement playing down serious interpretation of his comments and insisting he had never suggested abolishing the shoot-out.

For Beckenbauer it was no big deal. In fact, it was no deal at all. "We should leave things as they are," he said. "Penalties bring drama and excitement into the game. It is certainly a better solution to the toss of a coin which we used before."

Notable examples of the latter included Cologne's defeat by Liverpool in the quarter-finals of the 1965 European Cup and hosts Italy's victory over the Soviet Union in the semi-finals of the 1968 European Championship.

Experiments with both "golden goal" and "silver goal" systems of settling matches in extra-time were both unsatisfactory and were abandoned.

The "golden goal" saw a game concluded immediately one side took the lead in extra-time; the "silver goal" saw the game continue until the next scheduled break after one side took the lead in extra-time.

Germany won the Final of Euro 96 on a golden goal against Czech Republic, who were also the losers, this time on a silver goal, to Greece in the Euro 2004 semi-finals.

Further review

And what has Beckenbauer's Task Force come up with? Answer: Nothing. A proposal to revise the so-called triple sanction (foul/penalty/red card) has been returned for further review by the International Board, which also rejected a proposal for an additional extra-time sub.

Beckenbauer and Co even attacked the offside law, whose drafting has baffled all manner of officials down the years. His Task Force had no better luck.

He added: "These are the things we've been kicking around...it's been a load of fun to be able to work with this committee. It's a great job for us to do."

One man who has missed all the "fun" is Pele, who ranks his membership of the Task Force so seriously he has not yet attended even one meeting.

He has not missed much.

Roadmap gets the nod

FIFA Congress has approved the Reform Roadmap. This means that almost everything proposed by governance consultant Mark Pieth has been thrown forward for discussion and decision next year.

A sharpened-up code of ethics has been approved, though president Blatter became so carried away with his little homily in winding up Congress that he forgot a vote was needed. Fortunately secretary-general Jerome Valcke remembered.

Luis Moreno Ocampo, Argentinian chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, is favourite to land the role of chief investigator. This is intriguing after Blatter has complained for so long that sports authorities lacked the investigative tools available to the police.

What has changed?

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Bernstein's staying power

David Bernstein came home from FIFA Congress in a somewhat better place than at the same time last year.

In Zurich, Bernstein – attending his first Congress as chairman of the Football Association – created a stir by proposing a delay in the presidential election out of concern that the present incumbent, Sepp Blatter, was the only candidate following the suspension of Mohamed Bin Hammam.

That brought a storm of criticism down on Bernstein's head from senior FIFA figures such as Argentina's Julio Grondona and Spain's Angel Maria Villar. They took full advantage of an open goal to whinge on about British football's perceived "privileges" – such as four-way independence for the home nations and a permanent vice-presidency of FIFA.

However, before leaving Budapest this time, Bernstein remarked that FIFA's reform programme demonstrated that Blatter and the organisation had "really seen the light", though much remained to be done.

Bernstein said: "I have always said the proof of the pudding would be in the eating, but I must say I was very impressed today. I think the FA should take a little credit from having pushed this a year ago. We probably injected a little bit of urgency into the situation, but we have got to be impressed.

"There is still much work to be done, and [anti-corruption adviser] Professor Pieth made it quite clear this is not a tree to pick cherries from; you have to embrace the whole package and we will see if that happens.

"Everything was so traumatic last year for FIFA that I really think they have seen the light and there is every evidence of real intent."

Of course, if Bernstein had got his way last year then FIFA would have floundered, leaderless and without direction, for between three and six months. Certainly, though many feel the reform process is proceeding too slowly, FIFA would not even be at this stage.

> "I really feel FIFA have seen the light"
> FA chairman, David Bernstein

As for Bernstein, he will not last as long in his role in England as Blatter in Zurich. Bernstein is due to step down at the end of next season when he reaches the age of 70 – the mandatory retirement age under FA statutes. As for Blatter, now 76, FIFA is still considering the concept of age limits – and Paraguay's Nicolas Leoz has taken defensive action by having CONMEBOL appoint himself as "president for life".

As South Africa's Danny Jordaan once told me: "In FIFA it's always been the case that football officials put you in a job but only God could take you out."

Better...FIFA Congress was a happier place for FA chairman Bernstein this time

Nsekera's feminine touch

Ground-breaking role...Nsekera

At the turn of the century Sepp Blatter insisted that the "future of football is feminine". It may have taken 12 years but "the future", in FIFA terms, is named Lydia Nsekera.

She runs a car repair business in Burundi, has been a member of the International Olympic Committee since 2009, is the only woman president of a national football association and is now the first woman to serve on the FIFA ExCo.

Token appointment? Not so. If Nsekera gets her way, expect to see more women emerging in football leadership roles.

Not that her FIFA elevation was a shoo-in. Blatter reported: "Some members of the executive committee said: 'One year for a woman on the committee and then we will see about the future.' But I will defend this situation now we have achieved it.

"There was also a move by some people who said: 'If we are going to take a vote next year then surely there is no reason why we should admit a woman to the executive committee now?'"

First woman president of FIFA? Highly unlikely...but don't rule it out of court entirely.

If Michel Platini, Jerome Valcke and a few others are all contesting the Blatter succession in three years' time then a compromise candidate might be needed...

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- Lightweight Teijin synthetic leather upper
- Ultimate lightweight performance
- Explosive Speed FG: 46097

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- Full grain leather forefoot
- Pass pads
- Forefoot dampening pods FG: 46175

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- Soft calf leather upper
- Lightweight TPU sole-plate
- Poron cushioning FG: 46235

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Upset...Academica's Diogo Melo (left) hassles Matias Fernandez of Sporting Lisbon in the Portuguese Cup Final

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Making a splash...Ajax celebrate becoming Dutch champions

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HOLLAND

Under-17 success

The *Jong Oranje* won their second successive European Under-17 Championship, beating Germany in a penalty shoot-out after drawing 1-1 in the Final.

A header from Bochum's Leon Goretzka looked set to have given Germany a deserved win until a dramatic injury-time equaliser from Elton Acolatse of Ajax took the game to penalties, where AZ goalkeeper Nick Olij saved the crucial spot-kick from sub Marc Stendera of Eintracht Frankfurt.

RWANDA

International dies

Patrick Mafisango, a midfielder who was in the national squad to face Algeria in June's World Cup qualifier, was killed in a car accident. The 32-year-old, who played for Tanzania champions Simba, had just returned from Sudan, where his side had been beaten by Al Ahli Shendi in the CAF Confederation Cup.

Sitting it out again...Adebayor

TOGO

Adebayor pulls out

Six months after returning to the international fold, Emmanuel Adebayor has turned his back on the national side once again, denouncing a lack of ambition and anarchy in the country's football.

"I'm not retiring from international football," says the Manchester City striker, who spent last season on loan at Tottenham Hotspur.

"I'll come back when the conditions have improved."

Internationals

FRIENDLIES

Wednesday, March 21
Mar 21 - Remire-Montjoly
French Guiana 1 (Nalie 12)
Guyana 0
HT: 1-0

Thursday, March 22
Mar 22 - Remire-Montjoly
French Guiana 0
Guyana 2 (Abrams 63, Beresford 75)
HT: 0-0

Thursday, March 29
Mar 29 - Khartoum, Sudan
Egypt 2 (M Salah 60, Aboutraika 90+2)
Uganda 1 (F Kizito 34)
HT: 0-1
Egypt: El Hadary (El Shennawy 40) - Fathy, Nagieb (Hegazy 59), Fathallah, Abdelshafy, Soliman (El Nenny 59), I Salah (M Salah 59), Ghaly, Aboutraika, Shikabala (Temsah 79), Mekky (Abdel Zaher 72).
Uganda: Muwonge (Mugabi 86) - L Kizito (Juma 73), Emuge, Mpima (Kakembo 90+1), Ssali, Walusimbi, Guma, Kimuli, Omondi (Ssemakula 61), Bengo (Kazibwe 56), F Kizito (Okhuti 69).

Friday, March 30
Mar 30 - Kingstown
St Vincent & The Grenadines 1 (S Samuel 54)
Antigua & Barbuda 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Clarke (StL)
St Vincent & The Grenadines: Lynch - Richards (Peters 90), Richardson, James, McDowall, Trimmingham, Velox (Damal Francis 46), Hamlet (Balcombe 76), S Samuel (Hayde 80), M Samuel (Blake 67), Stewart.
Antigua & Barbuda: James - Dublin, R Christian (Kirwan 65), A Thomas, Blakely, Alexander (Williams 72), Griffith, Skepple (Smith 46), Burton, Jeremy (Robinson 75), Byers.

Saturday, March 31
Mar 31 - Omdurman, Sudan
Egypt 4 (M Salah 31, Khairy 44, Hissein og 89, Mekky 90+1)
Chad 0
HT: 2-0
Egypt: El Shennawy - Ali, Hegazy (Dewidar), Said (Salem), Nasef (Fathy), Khairy, El Nenny, El Taqy, Temsah, M Salah (Mekky), Abdel Zaher (Ashour).

Sunday, April 1
Apr 1 - Kingstown
St Vincent & The Grenadines 1 (S Samuel pen 56)
Antigua & Barbuda 2 (Robinson 19, Byers 51)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Brizan (T&T)
St Vincent & The Grenadines: Lynch - Richards (Peters 87), Richardson, James, McDowall (Balcombe 22), Trimmingham, Damal Francis, Hamlet (Stephens 80), S Samuel, M Samuel (Velox 70), Stewart.
Antigua & Barbuda: DeCastro - Dublin, Mack, A Thomas, Blakely, Alexander, Griffith, Robinson (Skepple 84), Burton (Kirwan 49), Smith, Byers (R Christian 76).

Saturday, April 7
Apr 7 - Les Abymes
Guadeloupe 0
Martinique 1 (Tresfield 36)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Vertot (Gdp)
Guadeloupe: Otrante - Rhoda, Lambourde, Gladone (Serman 41), Michee, Fautrai, Severin (Malacquis 62), Davidas (Elvy 46), Bolmin (Labuthie 74), Rambojan (Houelche 62), Zenon.
Martinique: Vermignon - Zaire, Cretinoir, Lowinsky, Berdix (Lozat 60), Herelle (Bannais 84), Nedra (Nattes 90), Reuperne, Abaul, Tresfield (Deluge 89), Mainge (Angely 64).

Wednesday, April 11
Apr 11 - San Jose
Costa Rica 1 (Vargas 50)
Honduras 1 (D Suazo 24)
HT: 0-1
Costa Rica: Pemberton - Lopez, G Gonzalez, Acosta, Salvatierra, J D Monge (N Monge 46), Cubero, Tejeda (Valverde 77), Sanchez (Castillo 69), Rojas, Vargas (Solorzano 80).
Honduras: N Valladares - Beckeles, Arzu (Velasquez 80), Murillo, J C Garcia, Delgado, Lozano (Cordova 74), Discua, O Garcia (Johnson 66), D Suazo (Bengtson 59), Costly (Lalin 59).

*Apr 11 - Tacna**
Peru 0
Chile 3 (Mena 46, Flores 64, Carrasco 72)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Caceres (Par)
Chile 6-1 on agg
**2nd leg of the Copa del Pacifico, a 2-leg meeting between the two countries*
Peru: Butron - Vasquez, Ramos, Galliquio, Yotun, Sheput (Cespedes 74), Gonzales, Ampuero (Marino 61), Quinteros (De la Haza 46), Cueva (Chiroque 46), Rengifo (Chavez 61). *Sent off: De la Haza 52min.*
Chile: Toselli - Casanova, Andia (Biskupovic 76), Dominguez (Toro 76), Figueroa (Carrasco 66), Diaz, Aranguiz, Mena (Campos 72), F Gutierrez (Rabello 73), Fernandes, Munoz (Flores 63).

Thursday, April 12
Apr 12 - Dubai, UAE
Egypt 3 (Temsah 25, Aboutraika pen 32, Mekky 90+5)
Nigeria 2 (Mba 13, K Uche 40)
HT: 2-2
Egypt: El Sayed - Ali (El Mohammady 46), Fathallah (Khairy 46), Said, Abdelshafy (Nasef 46), Ghaly, Aboutraika (Moteab 73), Ashour (Hassan 46), Temsah, Abdel Zaher (El Taqy 46), Mekky.
Nigeria: Agbim (Akpeyi) - Egwuekwe, Oboabona, Idris, Oshaniwa, Gabriel, H Uche, Uzoenyi, Nwachukwu, Mba (Azuka), K Uche.

Sunday, April 15
Apr 15 - Dubai, UAE
Egypt 3 (Geddo 25, 30, Moteab pen 38)
Mauritania 0
HT: 3-0
Egypt: Ekramy - El Mohammady (Ali), Dewidar, Nagieb, Nasef, Soliman, I Salah (Mekky), Hassan (Aboutraika), El Taqy (Khairy), Moteab (Abdel Zaher), Geddo (Temsah).

Tuesday, April 17
Apr 17 - Dubai, UAE
Egypt 0
Iraq 0
Egypt: El Hadary - El Mohammady, Ghaly, Fathallah, Abdelshafy, Ashour (I Salah 67), El Taqy (Soliman 73), Temsah (Khairy 85), Aboutraika (Hassan 60), Geddo (Moteab 60), Mekky.
Iraq: Gassid - Saeed, Rehema (Bahar 59), Abbas (Kadhim 71), Shakir, Munir (Mahdi Karim 86), Kamil (Majeed 32), Akram, Jassim, Abdul Zahra (Mustafa Karim 73), Mahmoud (Ahmed 69).

Wednesday, April 18
Apr 18 - Tehran
Iran 2 (Dehnavi 31, Ansarifard 33)
Mauritania 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 200
Iran: Forouzan (Gordan 46) - Mahini (Fakhredini 46), Khalilazadeh (Kouroshi 46), Amir H Sadeghi (E Karimi 46), Hajsafi (Akbar Sadeghi 46), Hadadifar (R Haghighi 46), Dehnavi (P Nouri 46), Zenidpour (Mosalman 46), Y Karimi (Sadeghian 46), Gholami (Ghazi 46), Ansarifard (Hassanzadeh 46).

Wednesday, April 25
Apr 25 - Guatemala City
Guatemala 0
Paraguay 1 (Mazacotte 6)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 7,000. **Ref:** Mejia (ESv)
Guatemala: Jerez - Flores, G Cabrera, Gallardo, Avila (Arreola 20; M Lopez 64), Castillo (Galindo 46), Leon, Morales, M Rodriguez (Romero 46), Pappa (O Lopez 72), Ruiz (Pezzarossi 64).
Paraguay: D Barreto (J Silva 69) - Mazacotte, Aguilar, Manzur, Bartomeus, Jorge Nunez (Ocampo 61), Mendoza (Mendieta 67), Ramos, Gimenez (Echeverria 75), Jose A Nunez (Velazquez 69), E Benitez (M Riveros 61).

Saturday, April 28
Apr 28 - Shah Alam
Malaysia 6 (Wan Zack 25, 27, Hazwan 71, 82, 90, Akil 84)
Sri Lanka 0
HT: 2-0

Wednesday, May 2
May 2 - Tehran
Iran 3 (Gholami 10, Dehnavi 40, P Nouri 58)
Mozambique 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 2,000. **Ref:** Bakhshizadeh (Irn)
Sent off: Imo 80min, Kapango 82min (both Mozambique)
Iran: Gordan (Forouzan 46) - E Karimi, P Nouri, Mahini, Khalilazadeh (Aahi 61), R Haghighi, Hadadifar (Zenidpour 46), Dehnavi (Akbar Sadeghi 46), Hajsafy (Sadeghian 61), Gholami, Ghazi (Nourozi 65).

May 2 - Le Lamentin
Martinique 2 (Parsemain 23, Delem 90+2)
Guyana 2 (Abrams 57, Peters 90+3)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Jeanvilliers (Mtq)
Martinique: Vermignon - Zaire (Berdix 46), Cretinoir, Dondon, Prudent (Lozat 83), Reuperne, Herelle, Nedra (Delem 46), Abaul (Vitulin 66), Parsemain (Angely 60), Mence (Tresfield 60).
Guyana: Reynolds - J Edwards, K Jacobs (Baker 88), Madramootoo, Dennis (Benfield 46), Nelson, Wilson (Schultz 84), Mannings (Grant 76), Bobb (Camacho 82), Peters, Abrams (Alleyne 71).

Friday, May 4
May 4 - Les Abymes
Guadeloupe 1 (Zenon 1)
Guyana 2 (Crandon 22, Mannings 66)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Vertot (Gdp)
Guadeloupe: Olol - Jerome, Sennoaj (Fautrai 70), Babel, Serman, Gomez, Bacoul (Elvy 84), Laurence (Michineau 80), Lafortune (Grava 56), Zenon, Gotin.
Guyana: C Edwards - Crandon, Nelson, K Jacobs, Baker, Wilson, Mannings, Bobb, Benfield, Peters, Holder.

Friday, May 11
May 11 - Tripoli
Lebanon 1 (Zoraiq pen 31)
Egypt 4 (Said 4, Mekky pen 20, Temsah 43, Khairy 49)
HT: 1-3
Egypt: El Hadary - Ali (Samir), Hegazy, Said (Alaa), Ramadan (Fathy), Khairy, El Taqy, El Nenny, M Salah (Hassan), Temsah, Mekky (Mohsen).

Wednesday, May 16
May 16 - Luanda
Angola 0
Zambia 0
Att: 20,000. **Ref:** Talaya
Zambia: Kakonje - Mulenga, Katebe, Sinyingwa, Chisenga (Kabamba), Nyirenda, F Katongo (Simwala), Sitali, Kabwe (Banda), Kangwa (Lungu; Mudenda), Kampamba (Nyaende).

Friday, May 18
May 18 - Montego Bay
Jamaica 1 (Lynch 61)
Guyana 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Marrufo (USA)
Jamaica: Barrett - Smith (Laing 52), Nosworthy (Damion Stewart 83), Mariappa, Virgo, Grandison, Senior (Stevens 53), R Reid (Lloyd 82), K Daley (Fraser 71), Shelton, Lynch (Dino Williams 76).
Guyana: Reynolds - J Edwards, David, Pollard, K Jacobs (Bobb 65), D Jacobs (Nelson 83), Mannings (Benfield 50), McKinnon, Peters (Beresford 74), Beveney (Abrams 73), C Cort (Mills 75).

May 18 - Sidon
Lebanon 1 (Al Saadi 88)
Jordan 2 (Al Dardour 7, 77)
HT: 0-1

Sunday, May 20
May 20 - Panama City
Panama 2 (Yau 70, Pinzon 73)
Guyana 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Perea (Pan)
Match played behind closed doors
Panama: Picart - L Henriquez (Godoy), Jean C Cedeno, Algandona, Vasquez (Flores), A Henriquez (Miller), Perez (Sanchez), Haywood (Pinzon), Javier Cedeno, Waithe, Yau (Stephens).
Guyana: Williams (C Edwards) - J Edwards, David, Pollard, K Jacobs, Beresford (Mills), Benfield (Mannings), McKinnon, Peters, Abrams (Wilson), C Cort (Beveney).

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EUROPA LEAGUE
Falcao does it again

Europa man...Atletico Madrid's Colombian striker Falcao celebrates another goal-laden Europa League run with a double strike against Athletic Bilbao in this year's Final in Bucharest

The long-term future of the Europa League is in question. Naturally everyone wants to be in the Champions League, but as that is not practical, running a second European club competition will always make sense. The challenge for UEFA is making it attractive to clubs and fans.

Some countries tend to look down their noses at the Europa League. But, as Bundesliga side Hamburg proved two years ago, a lengthy run can be financially rewarding, and clubs in Spain and Portugal now seem to have come to the same conclusion.

The proof has been out there on the pitch. Last year's Final in Dublin was an all-Portuguese affair between Porto and Braga, and this season it was an all-Spanish showdown between Atletico Madrid and their original parent club, Athletic Bilbao. Ironically, it was, of course, the Champions League Final that was supposed to have been the ultimate all-Spanish meeting, a *clasico* clash between Real Madrid and Barcelona.

Still, UEFA president Michel Platini – who had made no secret of his Madrid-Barca dream – would still have been pleased to see the less-fashionable Bilbao in a European Final. It was just a shame that a club who have shown great loyalty to players of Basque heritage failed to grace the Final with the kind of qualities that they had displayed on the road to Bucharest.

Nothing new

Reaching the Final was nothing new for the two sides; Atletico had beaten Fulham in extra time two years ago in Hamburg, while Bilbao had to look back a bit further, to 1977, when they lost narrowly over two legs to Juventus.

Last season, Colombian striker Radamel Falcao scored Porto's winning goal to earn himself a move to Atletico as replacement for Manchester City-bound Sergio Aguero. The faith of both player and new club was rewarded within little more than half an hour in Bucharest, by which time he had put Atletico into a decisive 2-0 lead. Brazilian playmaker Diego added a late third.

Falcao, however, may not still be scoring his goals for Atletico next season. No club which owes the taxman almost £100million can afford to reject the lucrative offers being prepared by Serie A and Premier League clubs.

The 12-goal top scorer in

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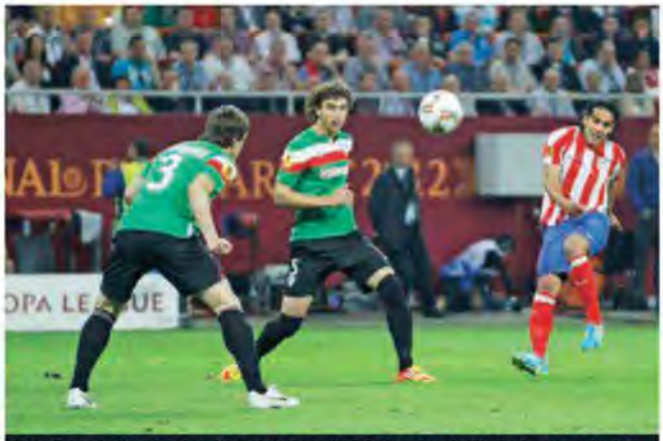
1-0...Falcao's stunning left-footed strike puts Atletico ahead after just seven minutes

2-0...Falcao leaves Jon Aurtenetxe sprawling on the floor as he strokes home a second

3-0...Diego steers the ball past Bilbao keeper Gorka Iraizoz to put Atletico out of sight

Atletico's victorious Europa League campaign looks to have all the gifts to succeed in any league. He is strong and powerful, with excellent technique, and possesses a warrior spirit that sees him running just as selflessly at the end of a match as he is at kick-off. Uniquely, the Colombian was also the Europa League's top scorer in 2010-11, when he managed a record haul of 17 goals, including the decisive goal in the Dublin finale.

Not that Atletico's fans were immediately impressed with their early viewing of Falcao after the *Colchoneros* paid a club-record £32m for his services last summer. But after collecting his man-of-the-match award in Bucharest, Falcao offered a wry reflection on his early struggle in the Spanish capital, saying: "After I joined Atletico last year some people said it was a mistake. Now I can say that they were the ones who were mistaken.

"We have had difficult moments, and some ups and downs, but we've worked hard and we deserved to finish up the season like this."

Simeone delight

Atletico's victory was also a personal triumph for Diego Simeone, the former Argentina midfielder who has now collected three trophies as a coach to add to the seven he won as a player – including victory with Internazionale in this competition when it was the UEFA Cup.

Simeone – who had coached his way to Argentinian league titles with Estudiantes and River Plate, and now boasts a first European prize – said: "I suppose I enjoyed winning this more as a player, but when you're a player you can shout and run around and celebrate however you want, whereas when you're the coach you know it's the players' moment and you have to keep calm.

"I'm proud of the players and the fans, and grateful to the people who trusted me last December."

That was when Simeone was brought back to the club, in place of sacked Gregorio Manzano, to sort out a faltering league campaign and gained the ultimate reward by guiding Atletico to their fourth European trophy.

Simeone had played for his national team under Marcelo Bielsa, who is now in charge of Bilbao and left the National Arena in Bucharest a thoroughly depressed man.

Two goals down in 34 minutes, a rash of second-half substitutions and tactical readjustments could not save the day for Bielsa's side, whose star striker Fernando Llorente was badly out of touch and decisively outclassed by his opposite number Falcao.

"I take full responsibility for how my team played and for what we did not manage to accomplish," said Bielsa. "It's tremendously disappointing. Our opponents deserved to win, although I don't think the basic difference between the two teams is as vast as what happened out there on the pitch made it appear. We just played into their hands and let them impose their style of play on the game.

"We didn't expect this result and the players are devastated. That's only natural. You can't get away from it."

Owning up to his own sense of guilt, Bielsa added: "The coach has to take the responsibility for what happens on the pitch and we are far better than we showed here. It's easy to be a coach when things go well, but when things go badly you have to accept your own responsibility.

"When it comes down to it, I coach them, I decide how we play and who plays and who does not."

Keir Radnedge

2012 EUROPA LEAGUE FINAL

MAY 9
Bucharest (National Arena)

ATLETICO MADRID 3
(Falcao 7, 34, Diego 85)
ATHLETIC BILBAO 0
HT: 2-0. Att: 52,347
Ref: Stark (Ger)

ATLETICO MADRID
Courtois – Juanfran, Godin, Miranda, Filipe Luis – Mario Suarez, Gabi – Diego (Koke 89), Adrian Lopez (Salvio 88), Arda Turan (Dominguez 90) – Falcao.
Coach: Simeone

ATHLETIC BILBAO
Iraizoz – Andoni Iraola, Javi Martinez, Amorebieta, Aurtenetxe (Ibai Gomez 46) – Ander Herrera (Toquero 62), Iturraspe (Inigo Perez 46), De Marcos – Susaeta, Llorente, Muniain.
Coach: Bielsa

Proud man...Atletico coach Simeone

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AUSTRIA: BUNDESLIGA

Salzburg's millions win through

Double delight...Salzburg added Austrian Cup Final glory to their Bundesliga title

Salzburg's millions proved too much for the opposition as they won their fourth championship in six seasons and completed a first-ever double with an easy 3-0 win over Ried in the Austrian Cup Final.

Despite a winless eight-match run in November and December, which left them in fifth place, Salzburg bounced back after the winter break and won their last eight matches to finish six points clear of Rapid Vienna.

A pitiful crowd of just 2,100 saw the 5-1 win at Wiener Neustadt in which Salzburg wrapped up the title – and, of those, only around 350 were supporting the champions. They completed the double in a depressingly empty Ernst Happel Stadium in Vienna where their supporters were also outnumbered.

The club used to have some of the country's most fanatical fans back in the days when they were known as Austria Salzburg, but many of them deserted the team following the Red Bull takeover in 2005. The promise of European success, which never materialised, was replaced by a sense of betrayal when the owners changed the club's colours from the traditional violet and white to the corporate red and blue.

After fruitlessly trying to persuade Red Bull to see reason, many supporters gave up and founded a new club. Taking up the club's old name, Austria Salzburg play in the original colours and, after starting in the bottom tier of Austrian football, have now risen to the third division.

The Red Bull club's home attendances averaged 9,851 – the third best in the league, behind Rapid Vienna's 16,367 and Sturm Graz, who were the only other side to manage over 10,000. Overall, the average attendance for Bundesliga games went down for the fifth season in a row, falling to 7,128 from a peak of 9,284 in 2007-08.

Open title race

Although Salzburg eventually finished well clear at the top of the table, the title race was one of the most open in years, with seven of the 10 teams still in contention with five matches to play.

The key game came in early May, when Salzburg won 1-0 at Rapid Vienna with a goal from Stefan Maierhofer, who had unsuccessful spells with Bristol City and Wolverhampton Wanderers. A £900,000 signing at the start of the season, Maierhofer's 14 goals made him the league's joint-top scorer along with team-mate Jakob Jantscher.

Salzburg were by far the biggest spenders, splashing out £2.27million on new players, including Brazilian midfielder Cristiano and Spanish striker Jonathan Soriano. However, this was a drop in the ocean compared to the £12m they splurged the previous season and the £5.6m in the one before that.

Rapid Vienna, on the other hand, spent only £1.02m on transfers and, despite failing to add to their record 32 titles, can be satisfied that they gave Salzburg such a good run for their money under coach Peter Schottel.

Admira, who enjoy the financial backing of the Trenkwalder personnel services company, finished a creditable third in their first top-flight season in their present incarnation. They join Rapid and Ried in the Europa League, while Salzburg are in the Champions League qualifiers.

The only other club to spend more than £1m in the transfer market were Austria Vienna, but it did them little good as they finished fourth and out of the European places.

It was never going to be easy after playmaker Zlatko Junuzovic left for Werder Bremen and forward Nacer Barazite joined Monaco. Poor results cost Karl Daxbacher his job in December and former Austria international Ivica Vastic replaced him, but he was released from his contract as soon as the season ended. The club immediately declared an interest in Franco Foda, who the very next day took up the vacant post at Kaiserslautern, having decided that the German second division was more attractive than the Austrian top flight.

Foda – overlooked for the job of national boss, which surprisingly went to little-known Swiss coach Marcel Koller – had failed to last the distance in an unhappy season at title-holders Sturm Graz, where he was replaced by Thomas Kristl.

There were also coaching changes at Ried, where Paul Gludovatz's four-year reign ended as he made way for the Gerhard Schweitzer/Manfred Angerschmid double act. However, despite taking the team to the Cup Final the duo were themselves axed the following day, to be replaced by Heinz Fuchsbichler, assistant coach at Al Wahda in the United Arab Emirates.

After five years in charge, Werner Gregoritish left Kapfenberg, but the new incumbent, Thomas Von Heeson, could not prevent the team from sliding into the second division after four seasons in the top flight. Not even the offer of free entry and free beer could attract more than 3,500 fans to their final game of the season. They will be replaced by WAC St Andra.

Brian Homewood

● *For league table, see page 105*

No1...Walke made place his own

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
ALEXANDER WALKE (Salzburg)
German goalkeeper who displaced the first-choice Eddie Gustafsson in November and then went on to concede only 18 goals in 31 games.

COACH OF THE SEASON
RICARDO MONIZ (Salzburg)
After junior roles at Tottenham Hotspur and Hamburg, the Dutchman was appointed Salzburg coach in April 2011. He responded by guiding the club to the double in his first full season in charge.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
JAKOB JANTSCHER (Salzburg)
Joint top scorer in the league with 14 goals, along with team-mate Stefan Maierhofer.

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BELGIUM: FIRST DIVISION

Jacobs walks away with title

Holding out...Anderlecht goalkeeper Proto punches clear during the 1-1 draw with Club Brugge that clinched the title for his side

Inspirational...striker Suarez

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
MATIAS SUAREZ (Anderlecht)
In his element playing in the "hole", the Argentinian positively thrived in his dual role of creator and finisher.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
THOMAS MEUNIER
(Club Brugge)
As talented as he is down-to-earth, the attacking midfielder or wide-man made the transition from third-tier to top-flight with ease after joining from Virton.

COACH OF THE SEASON
ARIEL JACOBS (Anderlecht)
His team may have been overly functional at times, but he still warrants the utmost praise for keeping all the large egos at Parc Astrid on side and in harmony.

The Anderlecht class of 2011-12 did not play great football, they were not the best team in the end-of-term play-offs featuring the top-six clubs from the regular season, and in the final furlongs they appeared nervous and jaded. Yet victors come in all shapes and sizes and, for all their faults, they were worthy champions, remaining at the top of the table for almost the entire campaign and finishing four points clear of runners-up Club Brugge.

Blessed with the deepest squad in the country, not to mention the most gifted individual players, Anderlecht clinched their 31st national title with two rounds of the play-offs to spare, finally hauling themselves over the line with a 1-1 home draw against Club Brugge.

But what hard work the Brussels side made of it. Sloppy and unconvincing for most of the game, they were seemingly set for defeat until winger Guillaume Gillet converted a 94th-minute penalty, the consequence of a foolhardy challenge on Dieumerci Mbokani by Club Brugge's Swedish defender Michael Almeback.

Despite the solid contributions of Silvio Proto - voted the best goalkeeper in the league - and Senegalese centre-back Cheikhou Kouayate, Anderlecht's triumph was mainly built on their incisive and classy front four. Although the left-sided Milan Jovanovic is not the most consistent, the Serb can be irresistible, while Gillet has gone from journeyman right-back to goal-hungry right-winger in the space of 12 months. Freewheeling Argentinian front runner Matias Suarez was inspired and DR Congo striker Mbokani bounced back after a terrible sequence of personal and career misfortunes that included the death of his five-month-old son last year.

Minor surprise

The decision of Anderlecht coach Ariel Jacobs to walk away at the end of the season was only a minor surprise. In charge at Parc Astrid for four-and-a-half years - he is the club's longest-serving boss in five decades - Jacobs may have won two titles but he was never a media darling, and was regularly slammed for his negative tactics, lack of charisma and failures in Europe. The wave of criticism that followed a Belgian Cup loss to third division Rupel Boom and Europa League elimination at the hands of AZ Alkmaar may well have helped push him towards the exit.

Discipline and resolve had more to do with Club Brugge's second-place finish than creativity and risk taking. On replacing the sacked Adrie Koster as coach, Christoph Daum only seemed concerned with tending to his back line and, although the German won plenty of games, a dearth of invention and ambition left most supporters cold.

Perhaps feeling unloved, Daum handed in his resignation as soon as the play-offs were over and the baton now passes to Georges Leekens, who surprisingly quit as Belgium's national coach. Leekens, a former Club Brugge defender and coach, will be succeeded at national level on an interim basis by his number two, former striker Marc Wilmots.

With Chelsea-bound starlet Kevin De Bruyne excelling in a central playmaking role, reigning champions Genk made up for a slow start and were a real force in the latter stages of the season, gaining more points than anyone else in the play-offs. They ended up qualifying for the Europa League, where they will be joined by domestic cup winners Lokeren and the ever-reliable Gent, who prevailed in a two-legged Euro eliminator against Cercle Brugge.

While Anderlecht go into the Champions League, Chelsea's victory in this season competition means the Belgian champions now have to pre-qualify for the tournament in August, rather than take an automatic berth.

Normally synonymous with guts and purpose, Standard Liege were the season's underachievers, unable to do better than an insipid fifth-place finish. Their big-name departures of last year – Steven Defour, Axel Witsel and Mehdi Carcela – were simply not replaced and coach Jose Riga proved totally out of his depth, forever changing his mind about tactics and starting line-ups. Not surprisingly, he has since stepped down.

Sint-Truiden and Westerlo succumbed to relegation and will be replaced by Waasland-Beveren and second division champions Charleroi. The celebrations of the Charleroi supporters were tainted by reports that club owner Abbas Bayat has financial woes and may look to sell the club.

Nick Bidwell

● *For league table, see page 105*

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BULGARIA: A PFG

Debutants Ludogorets do the double

Rise...Ludogorets celebrate winning their first-ever national championship just two years after they were playing in the third tier

For the first time in 28 years, the league title was settled by a meeting of the top two teams on the final day of the season. CSKA Sofia were two points ahead of Ludogorets when they met in Razgrad, but the top-flight debutants won 1-0 to add the league title to the Bulgarian Cup they had won a week earlier with a 2-1 win over Lokomotiv Plovdiv.

Ludogorets and CSKA had been level on points before the winter break, with the team from the provinces crowned winter champions on goal difference. However, CSKA were unlucky to lose the title, hitting the woodwork three times on the last day before losing to a goal from ex-Levski Sofia striker Miroslav Ivanov.

In added time, Ludogorets' Serbian goalkeeper Urosh Golubovich saved a dangerous free-kick from Brazilian striker Junior Moraes. Both sides finished with 10 players after red cards for Angel Granchov (CSKA) and Svetoslav Dyakov (Ludogorets), while CSKA coach Stoycho Mladenov was sent from the bench in the first minute of the second half for protesting too strongly about a refereeing decision.

Victory for Ludogorets completed an amazing journey in recent seasons. They were promoted from the third division in 2010, the second division in 2011 and have now won the league and cup in 2012.

Club owner Kiril Domuschiev can take a lot of the credit for the success. He has invested heavily in the stadium, new players and an impressive youth scheme.

Club coach Ivaylo Petev, a journeyman player with Litex in the 1990s, has built a team composed of experienced Bulgarians and promising foreigners.

"I can't believe this," said Petev. "At the start of the season, I hoped to be among the top six. But later our appetite got bigger."

Ivan Stoyanov, nephew of BFU vice-president Yordan Lechkov, and Moraes of CSKA were the league's top scorers with 16 goals each.

Mladenov had revived CSKA's fortunes in the spring with a string of important victories, but he made a big mistake when he claimed "there is a government directive for Levski to be champions". Results turned against CSKA as they lost the Sofia derby to Levski and then away at Minior, and their advantage was reduced to two points before the last round of matches.

Levski had one of their worst seasons. After being replaced by Nikolay Kostov, Georgi Ivanov returned before being replaced again, this time by former boss Yassen Petrov, who took over until the end of the season. For most of the campaign it looked as if Levski would miss out on European competition for the first time since 1990, but mistakes by their rivals allowed them to finish in third place.

Very close

Chernomorets were very close to taking part in Europe for the first time since 1989, but they blew their chance with a 1-1 draw at home to Lokomotiv Sofia. However, their coach, Dimitar Dimitrov, proved once again that he is one of the best coaches currently working in Bulgarian football.

For the first time since 2000, former champions Litex failed to qualify for Europe. That was despite the high-profile hiring of Hristo Stoichkov as coach.

Scandals continued to dog Bulgarian football. Minior president Nikifor Vangelov, angry at decisions in the match against Litex, fielded a team of youth players at home to Ludogorets and lost 7-0.

From next season, the number of teams in the First Division will be reduced from 16 to 14.

Ludogorets will compete in the second qualifying round of next season's Champions League, while CSKA, Levski and Lokomotiv Plovdiv will all take part in the Europa League.

Lokomotiv took "the last train" to Europe, as the runners-up in the domestic cup against the new champions. Their coach Emil Velev reached the Final for the second year in a row (last year he was with Slavia), but lost both matches.

Vidima-Rakovski, Kaliakra and Svetkavitsa were relegated to the second division. The new members of the first division will be the 1991 champions, Etar Veliko Tarnovo, debutants Pirin Gotse Delchev and the winner of a play-off between Botev Plovdiv and Sportist Svoge.

Rumen Paytashev

● *For league table, see page 105*

Impressive leader...Gargorov

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
EMIL GARGOROV (Ludogorets)
The former Lokomotiv and CSKA midfielder used his experience well as captain and leader of the new champions.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
ANTON KARACHANAKOV (CSKA Sofia)
The 20-year-old midfielder and free-kick specialist came through at Pirin Blagoevgrad before he made his mark with CSKA.

COACH OF THE SEASON
IVAYLO PETEV (Ludogorets)
Proved the sceptics wrong and handled the pressure well.

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CZECH REPUBLIC: 1.LIGA

Dramatic last day in title race

Thrilling finish... Slovan Liberec's Zbynek Musiol (left) and Jiri Jarosik of Sparta

While Czech football hasn't entirely escaped the shadows cast by financial problems, fan unrest and match-fixing scandals, there were reasons to be cheerful last season.

And chief among them was goals. Top-flight clubs scored 635 times during the campaign, the best haul since an independent Czech Republic League was established in 1993. A major contributor to that total was David Lafata, whose 25 goals for Jablonec broke the league record.

A thrilling end to the season also lifted spirits. Slovan Liberec hosted defending champions Viktoria Plzen on the final day of the season with both teams still chasing the title. With the country's two highest-scoring teams playing out a 0-0 draw, Liberec picked up their third championship title since the Czech-Slovak split.

Inspired by veteran midfielder Jiri Stajner and young wing-back Theodor Gebre Selassie, the north Bohemian side's triumph had seemed unlikely earlier in the season. After an indifferent start, an unexpected 3-0 away win over Sparta proved Liberec's quality. But, despite this, the Prague side continued to make the early running and by December they were six points clear at the top.

However, the club's leadership then took the decision to dismiss sporting director Jozef Chovanec, ostensibly for Sparta's failure to qualify for the Europa League's group phase earlier in the season.

Jaroslav Hrebik, whose defensive football had proved unpopular with fans in his previous spells at Sparta, was charged with clearing out the old guard. Iconic defender Tomas Repka left for Ceske Budejovice in January, while veteran goalkeeper Jaromir Blazek was transferred to second-tier Jihlava the following day. Hrebik's bold moves might have won the fans round had results gone his way, but Sparta's form began to suffer in the spring, allowing Liberec back into the title race.

Adding to the air of gloom at Sparta, popular deputy chairman Lukas Pribyl was found dead in his office in February, aged 33, the victim of a congenital heart defect.

Bouncing back

Sparta seemed back on course for the title after winning 3-1 in Liberec in April to go one point ahead of their main title rivals with six games remaining. But Liberec bounced back to win their next three games as Sparta spluttered, drawing at home with Teplice and losing away to Mlada Boleslav.

Liberec's 0-0 draw with Slovacko gave Sparta some hope, but a 2-0 derby win in Jablonec left Slovan needing only a point from their final game, at home to a resurgent Plzen, to clinch the title.

Having won the title last season, Plzen slipped to third this time but their campaign can hardly be considered a failure. Having tangled with Barcelona and Milan in the Champions League's group phase, Pavel Vrba's side qualified for the Europa League, losing to Schalke in extra time to make a very honourable exit.

Freed from European commitments, Plzen made a spectacular late run. Having fallen nine points behind the leaders in April, they won eight of their last 10 games to come within a goal of retaining the title on the final day.

Confirming the quality of Vrba's squad, five Plzen players – David Limbersky, Frantisek Rajtoral, Daniel Kolar, Vaclav Pilar and Milan Petrzela – were named in the country's provisional Euro squad.

Sigma Olomouc provided one of the season's more remarkable stories. Docked nine points for their part in a match-fixing scandal, they turned to veteran Petr Ulicny to save the club from relegation in December. As well as overseeing a remarkable escape, Ulicny also led Olomouc to the first trophy in their 93-year history, beating Sparta in the Cup Final, before going back into retirement.

For fans of Slavia Prague it was another torturous season. New owner Ales Rebicek's baffling decision to appoint diehard Sparta fan Frantisek Straka as coach in October prompted fan protests and death threats. Initially, Straka was immune to the pressure, leading his team to three wins, but he stepped down in March following a run of poor results. Under caretaker Martin Poustka they only just avoided being sucked into a relegation battle.

Prague sides Bohemians 1905 and Viktoria Zizkov were not so fortunate and they went down.

Sam Beckwith

● *For league table, see page 105*

Bright spot...Krejci

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
LADISLAV KREJCI (Sparta Prague)
The left-sided 19-year-old midfielder's performances were one of the few bright spots in Sparta's dismal trophy-less season.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
JIRI STAJNER (Slovan Liberec)
Now 36, the attacking midfielder's 15 goals and 16 assists were key components of his side's title win and made him a controversial omission from the country's Euro 2012 squad.

COACH OF THE SEASON
PETR ULICNY (Sigma Olomouc)
In his second spell at Sigma, the wisecracking veteran coach overcame a nine-point deduction to guide his home-town club to safety and win the Cup.

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DENMARK: SUPERLIGA

Fairy-tale campaign for minnows

Settled...Andreas Laudrup (in red) scores Nordsjaelland's second against Horsens

The name Laudrup has resonated through Danish football for almost half a century and the family magic continues to conjure headlines.

Nearly 50 years after his grandfather Finn Laudrup was instrumental in the rise and rise of Brondby, and nearly 30 years after his father Michael Laudrup developed into one of the world's great players, so 21-year-old Andreas Laudrup has written his own chapter in the folklore of the game in Denmark.

It was his goal that clinched a first-ever Superliga title for Nordsjaelland, the small-town club that ripped up the usual script of Copenhagen domination.

Brought on as a sub to wrap up a match against Horsens that Nordsjaelland needed to win for the title, Laudrup made it 2-0 in the 81st minute to banish the nerves that still consumed the fans at the Farum stadium. The match ended 3-0, with Andreas Bjelland ensuring the title left Copenhagen for the first time in four years.

Nordsjaelland's success story is an improbable tale.

Created 10 years ago, from the old Farum club, they had won the Danish Cup two years running, in 2010 and 2011, and those victories prompted the Danish FA to poach coach Morten Wieghorst to take over the national under-21 side. In came Kasper Hjulmand, who had an atrocious start, taking just one point from the first three matches. But he persevered, making them hard to beat, and they resolutely kept the pressure on Copenhagen, who sacked new coach Roland Nilsson in the winter break and then crumbled under fresh boss Carsten V Jensen.

Crucially, Nordsjaelland won the head-to-head matches between the clubs, and then winter loan signing Kasper Lorentzen scored the winning goal in the penultimate game away to Brondby that took them top of the table. Victory on the final evening at home to Horsens, with Laudrup scoring, seemed almost predestined.

Scant consolation

Copenhagen suffered from too many draws and a lack of leadership – not just in the managerial merry-go-round, but also the absence of former skipper William Kvist who had been sold to Stuttgart. They won the Danish Cup, with a 1-0 triumph in the Final against Horsens, but it was scant consolation.

After eight titles in 11 years, they felt bereft and, for once, the future looks anything but bright for Denmark's richest club. They have even said they will not stand in the way of striker Dame N'Doye, the season's top scorer with 18 goals, if he wants to leave.

Defeat for Horsens on the final day meant that Midtjylland finished the season in third place, although both clubs qualify for the Europa League. Nordsjaelland are straight into the Champions League, while Copenhagen will have to qualify.

Lyngby and Koge went down.

Jim Holden

● *For league table, see page 106*

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
ANDREAS BJELLAND
(Nordsjaelland)
Strong, ball-playing central defender who was at the heart of the champions' outstanding campaign and played his way into the national side.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
NICKLAS HELENIUS (AB)
The 21-year-old 6ft 5in striker scored 14 goals in the Superliga, attracting attention from a flurry of European scouts.

COACH OF THE SEASON
KASPAR HJULMAND
(Nordsjaelland)
The little-known former manager of Lyngby only took over from Morten Wieghorst last summer.

Impressive...Hjulmand

Off...Copenhagen say they won't stand in N'Doye's way if he wants to go this summer

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FRANCE: LIGUE 1

Everything settled in final-day flourish

Drama...Bordeaux's Landry N'Guemo (left) and Jean-Pascal Mignot of Saint-Etienne

There's nothing better in league football than when pretty much everything's still up for grabs on the last day of the season. On the final Sunday of the Ligue 1 campaign there were so many permutations and possibilities that it positively made your head spin.

Would Paris Saint-Germain or Montpellier be crowned champions? Who out of Bordeaux, Saint-Etienne, Rennes and Toulouse would nab the final Europa League slot behind Lyon?

And which of the eight clubs in danger would fill the two remaining relegation slots alongside Auxerre, who had already slipped through the trapdoor?

At the top of the table it was a real David versus Goliath scenario as homespun Montpellier charm took on Parisian megabucks. The Qatari-backed PSG had spent over £100million in constructing their squad, including £34m on attacking midfielder Javier Pastore from Palermo. Montpellier president Louis Nicollin, meanwhile, had laid out a scarcely believable £5.6m for his entire squad.

In the end it was Montpellier who claimed the title. They won 2-1 at relegated Auxerre on the final day to maintain their three-point advantage over PSG, who had won at Lorient by the same score.

Anyone in France who wasn't a PSG fan was willing the minnows on, and when John Utaka's brace sealed the deal there was a huge outpouring of emotion in recognition of the underdogs' incredible achievement.

Yet despite clinching a Champions League place for next season, the fairy tale could quickly turn into a nightmare for Nicollin and his coach, Rene Girard. A number of top clubs are looking at Montpellier's most prized possessions – most notably 21-goal Olivier Giroud, defensive rock Mapou Yanga-Mbiwa and midfield genius Younes Belhanda.

Breathtaking final game

In the end it was Francis Gillot's Bordeaux who snatched that last Europa League place after a breathtaking final game away at Saint-Etienne, who were also chasing a European spot. In a see-saw game at the Stade Geoffroy-Guichard, Bordeaux came out on top 3-2 – a result that also put paid to Rennes' European hopes, despite their crushing 5-0 home win against hapless Dijon, who were relegated with only nine men on the pitch.

The other team to say farewell to Ligue 1 were Caen, beaten 3-1 at Valenciennes and demoted in 18th place out of 20 with 38 points. Last season Monaco were relegated with 44 points, but this time around no less than six clubs retained their top-flight status with fewer points, underlining just how tight things were down at the bottom of the table.

Corsican side Bastia returned to Ligue 1 after a seven-year absence, winning the second division title just a year after coach Frederic Hantz had brought them up from the third tier. They will be joined in the top flight next term by Reims and Troyes.

Elsewhere, the once all-conquering Lyon will be reasonably satisfied with their first season under coach Remi Garde. A new, financially-prudent realpolitik meant that fourth-place and a French Cup win over minnows Quevilly, thereby unlocking Europa League football, can be viewed as something of a success.

Marseille, who had financial problems of their own, ended an undistinguished campaign in 10th-place obscurity. Coach Didier Deschamps saved some face by winning the League Cup, thereby earning a place in the qualifying rounds of the Europa League, but had l'OM not been so strapped for cash it's possible that he would have been shown the door before the season's end.

And a word in closing for Eden Hazard, who said *adieu* to Ligue 1 by scoring a hat-trick for Lille – who were already guaranteed Champions League qualifying round football with a third-place finish – in a 4-1 defeat of Nancy. The prodigiously talented Belgian midfielder is off to England, but finished his time with *Les Dogues* by scoring 20 goals and notching up 15 assists.

France's loss is very much England's gain.

Howard Johnson

Winners...Lyon claim the French Cup

Game changer...Hazard

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
EDEN HAZARD (Lille)
The 21-year-old midfielder enjoyed his best-ever season and has both natural ability and the knack for game-changing interventions to become a global superstar in the very near future.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
YOUNES BELHANDA (Montpellier)
When there are people claiming that the 22-year-old midfielder could be even better than Eden Hazard, and no-one laughs, you know this is definitely a player to keep a very beady eye on.

COACH OF THE SEASON
RENE GIRARD (Montpellier)
Nobody else in France came close to matching the likeable and low-key coach's achievement in steering a team constructed from small change and moulding them into an entertaining, exciting and championship-winning outfit.

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GREECE: SUPER LEAGUE

Olympiakos complete another double

The Super League may have had its share of problems during the season, but it was business as usual by the end for Olympiakos, who retained their league title and added the Greek Cup.

A 39th championship may have looked beyond them as they trailed Panathinaikos by eight points at the midway stage, but Olympiakos eventually caught their arch-rivals and triumphed by a margin of seven points, with the big turning point coming in the derby game between the two sides at the Olympic Stadium in Athens.

Away fans were banned from the game, but with Olympiakos winning 1-0 the game was abandoned when Panathinaikos followers rioted and fought with police. Pana were docked three points for the violence in a move which handed the title to their rivals in early April.

Later that month, David Fuster headed an extra-time winner to give Olympiakos a 2-1 victory over Atromitos to ensure victory in the Greek Cup Final for a 25th time and complete a 15th double. Atromitos will now compete in next season's Europa League, along with PAOK and AEK.

Ernesto Valverde can rightly be proud of taking Olympiakos to their 14th league crown in the past 16 seasons, but the 48-year-old coach rejected the chance to lead the team in next season's Champions League.

"This is a very difficult day for me as I am announcing my departure from the team," said Valverde after his third domestic title in as many seasons with the club, having led Olympiakos to the 2009 title before repeating the trick last term after returning from an unsuccessful spell at Villarreal.

"The main reason I am leaving is personal."

Olympiakos owner Vangelis Marinakis begged the Spaniard to stay for at least another season, but he was unable to change Valverde's mind.

Marinakis called Valverde "more a friend than a coach" and said that "the door is always open for him". He then went on to say: "Ernesto, with his appearance in Greece, upgraded Greek football and I know he will be a good ambassador for Greece and Olympiakos wherever he goes from here."

Riot...a Panathinaikos supporter turns a water hose on police at the Olympic Stadium

Runners-up Panathinaikos must get through the qualifying stage if they are to join Olympiakos in the group phase of next season's Champions League, and they might have run the club from Piraeus even closer for the title had Argentinian striker Sebastian Leto – the league's leading scorer at the time, with 15 goals and five assists – not missed a crucial part of the campaign through injury.

Financial nightmare

Off the pitch, money matters also affected Panathinaikos, with Swedish defender Mattias Bjarsmyr becoming the first active player in the club's history to seek legal action for unpaid wages.

With a reported debt of more than £20million, all of the club's directors resigned in March in the hope that a new board could find a solution to the financial nightmare.

"We made a great effort, but now there are no minimum guarantees to work with," said the outgoing chairman, Dimitris Gontikas. "With these developments we cannot do anything. I hope Panathinaikos will find its way."

Another former board member, Thanassis Giannakopoulos, even suggested that the club was "facing dissolution". He said: "I find it inconceivable that, after 35 years at Panathinaikos, I see ourselves in this situation. The ship is sinking. I cannot understand how we reached this point."

Panathinaikos were not the only club in financial trouble, though. Athens club AEK and two Salonica sides, PAOK and Aris, all had money troubles of their own.

AEK players refused to attend the team's annual Christmas party in protest at the club's failure to meet financial obligations towards them, while players from Aris held a 48-hour strike in March to protest at the non-payment of wages. And in a season when a record 12 coaches were sacked, Aris were responsible for the dismissal of three of those.

The Super League season had started in chaos, kicking off with 14 teams – after a decision to demote Olympiakos Volos and Kavala for their involvement in the match-fixing scandal – and then expanded to 16 teams in November, after seven rounds had been played, with the addition of Doxa Drama and Levadiakos from the second tier.

Although Levadiakos managed to survive, Doxa went straight back down, relegated along with Ergotelis and Panetolikos. They will be replaced by Veria, Panthrakikos and the winners of the second-tier promotion play-off.

And if violence, financial meltdown and match fixing were not enough, the Greek football federation claims that the new government sports bill could cast their teams into international exile and "kill" the sport.

The bill gives more power to the state-run Professional Sports Commission to impose penalties on clubs and to make frequent inspections of their financial status.

"Our intent is to protect the state from unscrupulous groups who do not pay taxes, levies and have criminal records," said Pavlos Geroulanos, the culture minister in charge of sports.

But the football authorities believe the bill is a violation of its self-governed status, as stipulated by FIFA, and that this may lead to Greek teams being banned from international competition.

Lou Economopoulos

● *For league table, see page 107*

Fitting farewell...Valverde

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
KEVIN MIRALLAS (Olympiakos)
The 24-year-old Belgium international striker was the league's top scorer, with 20 goals in 25 games, as his side won the domestic double.

COACH OF THE SEASON
ERNESTO VALVERDE
(Olympiakos)
In three seasons with Olympiakos the Spaniard has helped the club to win three league titles and two Greek Cups. "I have completed my cycle at Olympiakos," he said upon rejecting an extension to his contract with the champions.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
PANAGIOTIS VLACHODIMOS
(Xanthi)
The 20-year-old, who was born in Germany, played for Stuttgart reserves before moving to Xanthi last summer. A member of the Greece under-19 and under-21 squads, his exceptional dribbling caught the eye of Olympiakos, among others.

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HOLLAND: EREDIVISIE
De Boer's boys win again

Bright future...Ajax scored more than anyone else and won the league by six points

While it could never be argued that the Eredivisie is one of Europe's best leagues, it is certainly one of the continent's most unpredictable.

Ajax were 13 points behind leaders AZ in November and looked out of the title running. But a run of 13 consecutive victories after the winter break saw the Amsterdam side retain their crown. Two goals by Siem De Jong – who also scored twice in the decisive game against Twente last season – against VVV in the penultimate game was enough to secure the club's 31st title.

Frank De Boer's second championship was achieved in difficult circumstances. In the background the supervisory board and Johan Cruyff were waging a fierce battle, with the appointment of Louis Van Gaal in an attempt to block Cruyff's revolution marking a low. The only real harmony was on the pitch, where De Boer's young side demonstrated togetherness and confidence, and perhaps gave a glimpse of the future when they won 2-1 away to Manchester United in the Europa League.

Equally impressive were Feyenoord, whose runners-up spot and qualification for next season's Champions League along with Ajax was something of a minor miracle, considering how far they had sunk.

After a disastrous previous campaign in which they finished 10th, the cash-strapped club seemed to have eliminated themselves from contention even before the season started when a player revolt sealed the fate of coach Mario Been. But something ugly can sometimes turn into something beautiful, even when money is tight. With low-budget players like midfielder Jordy Clasie returning from satellite club Excelsior and young Swedish striker John Guidetti joining on loan from Manchester City, new boss Ronald Koeman's disciplined approach squeezed the most out of the team.

Biggest disappointment

PSV were the season's biggest disappointment. Despite an investment of £25million in players such as Kevin Strootman, Dries Mertens and Tim Matavz, they could only finish third and were never convincing. The sacking of coach Fred Rutten in March didn't help matters. Caretaker Phillip Cocu did win the Dutch Cup, beating Heracles 3-0 in the Final, but by then the league title was out of reach. Cocu will return to the club's youth academy this summer, making way for Dick Advocaat after the Euros.

AZ probably had the best results of this season. They were table-toppers for 16 Eredivise rounds, Dutch Cup semi-finalists and Europa League quarter-finalists, before running out of steam in the latter stages and ended up fourth. Losing points in injury time against Twente (drawing 1-1) and PSV (a 3-2 defeat) proved fatal.

Like Feyenoord, Heerenveen made a fine recovery after a poor previous term in which they finished 12th. Last summer coach Ron Jans had been on the brink of dismissal, partly due to his disagreements with striker Bas Dost. But with everybody on board by the start of the season the side finishing fifth and Dost was the league's top scorer with 32 goals.

The finale of their season, however, was surreal to say the least. To ensure a Europa League place, Heerenveen had to win or lose to Feyenoord in their last game – bizarrely, a draw would not suffice – so it was no surprise that they went down 3-2.

Another huge disappointment were Twente, who brought in Steve McClaren for Co Adriaanse and finished sixth. Adriaanse neglected the club's structure and philosophy, not least by leaving £4.5m signing Leroy Fer on the bench, claiming that he didn't need the midfielder. However, re-hiring McClaren – who led Twente to the title in 2010 – wasn't a guarantee for success and Adriaanse actually won more points than the ex-England boss.

Although Twente were eliminated by RKC Waalwijk in the play-offs they will be in the Europa League via the UEFA Fair Play rankings. But even that ticket would have been out of reach if fair play winners Heerenveen hadn't already qualified.

RKC, newly-promoted and with one of the league's smallest budgets, were the surprise of the season. Coach Ruud Brood – who is on his way to Roda JC and will be replaced by Erwin Koeman – almost led his side into Europe. They fell at the final hurdle, however, losing 5-2 to Vitesse in the Europa League play-off Final. Vitesse owner Merab Jordania, is a close friend of Chelsea's Roman Abramovich and he will be watching his club take their first steps on the road to a planned league title in the next few years.

Groningen and Den Haag, who were in the European play-offs a year ago, only just escaped relegation this time, finishing 14th and 15th respectively.

Not so lucky were bottom club Excelsior and relegation play-off losers De Graafschap, who both went down. Replacing them will be second division champions Zwolle – who will use their old name PEC Zwolle again next term – and Willem II.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

● *For league table, see page107*

Late strike...Matavz (in stripes) scores a 93rd-minute winner for PSV against AZ

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
JAN VERTONGHEN (Ajax)
Belgian skipper who led his team to the title after the winter break. Physically strong, he is on his way to one of Europe's top leagues this summer.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
JOHN GUIDETTI (Feyenoord)
The Swedish striker arrived on loan from Manchester City and became a crowd favourite for his flair, workrate and 20 goals – which included a hat-trick against arch-rivals Ajax.

COACH OF THE SEASON
RONALD KOEMAN (Feyenoord)
Led his young team to a Champions League qualifying spot and kept control of the squad by focusing on discipline. He was never afraid to take unpopular decisions.

Tough...Koeman

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HUNGARY: NEMZETI BAJNOKSAG I

Debrecen take the main prize

Photo: Zsolt Retz

Winner...Debrecen's Luis Ramos (left) gets the better of Ujpest midfielder David Barczi in their Hungarian Cup semi-final clash

It was Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban who presented the league championship trophy to Debrecen – the team from the country's second city and where his ruling Fidesz party has its power base.

Unbeaten all season, Debrecen saw out mid-term challenges from title-holders Videoton and Gyor, but in the end they ran out easy winners by eight points. Their final game – at home to Haladas in front of a capacity crowd of 10,000 – was a routine celebration, the title having been won a fortnight previously. Over the campaign, Debrecen scored the most goals (64), conceded the least (18) and beat their closest rivals home and away.

The fans packing downtown Kossuth Square afterwards were not only cheering the title that had just been won under coach Elemer Kondas, but also a sixth title in eight seasons. After declaring that a new stadium would be opened here in the spring of 2014, Orban told the local media: "Debrecen is the football hub of Hungary."

It's certainly not Budapest any longer. Although an occasionally impressive Honved side took fourth place on the last day thanks to a rather bizarre 4-3 win in Pecs – and thus a Europa League spot – the other clubs from the capital trailed behind even lowly Siofok. Debt-ridden Vasas were relegated, with city rivals Ferencvaros and Ujpest not that far above them. As the local sports paper blasted out on its front page on the day of what was once Hungary's big derby: "Battle! For 10th place."

Enviable consistency

With Debrecen displaying enviable consistency, it was Videoton and Gyor who would drop crucial points. Gyor's 3-1 home defeat to Honved and Vidi's 2-0 home defeat to Kecskemet saw each lose ground to Hungary's top club. From the start, a 5-2 win over Vasas featuring a hat-trick by eventual top league goalscorer Adamo Coulibaly, Debrecen signalled their intent.

In the third round, a goal on the stroke of half-time by midfielder Adam Bodi saw off Ferencvaros 1-0, and a fortnight later Videoton were put to the sword, 2-1.

In this early stage of the season, much was made of popular revivals by Diosgyor and Pecs, both working-class sides emerging from the doldrums to attract decent crowds in unlikely challenges for a place in Europe. But it wasn't to be as both suffered wretched form in the spring, allowing Honved, Paks and Kecskemet to come through.

On the last weekend of the season, all three had their matches kick off at the same time. UEFA had ruled out third-placed Gyor's admission to next season's Europa League due to irregularities surrounding a previous transfer, and each was out to grab a chance of European riches.

That it fell to Honved is a mere quirk of fate. The league table doesn't lie, and the top three were head and shoulders above the rest. But for the departure of prolific Brazilian striker Andre Alves in the winter break, Videoton may have put in a much stronger challenge.

The only Budapest side to emerge from 2011-12 with any real credit are MTK. Easy winners in the western division of the lower flight, they gave Debrecen a real fright in the Hungarian Cup Final at the Ferenc Puskas national stadium. Debrecen won a penalty shoot-out 8-7 in a match watched by fewer than 4,000 spectators.

Videoton won the Hungarian League Cup, beating Kecskemet 3-0 in the Final.

The other positive story was provided by Egri from the historic town of Eger, which is known more for its wine and its water polo team. Promoted from the third division in 2011, Egri didn't even have a team six years ago. With a 6,000-capacity ground and no website, Eger were unlikely winners of the Eastern Division and should provide an unusual addition to the NBI next season.

Peterjon Cresswell

● *For league table, see page 108*

Photo: Zsolt Retz

Top scorer...Coulibaly (right)

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
ADAMO COULIBALY (Debrecen)
The Paris-born target man was the top league scorer with 20 goals.

COACH OF THE SEASON
ELEMER KONDAS (Debrecen)
A player, assistant, reserve boss and now a title-winning coach in his own right, the 48-year-old took over towards the end of the previous season.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
ADAM BODI (Debrecen)
The 21-year-old midfielder was the club's second-highest league scorer with eight goals and a regular in the national under-21 team.

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POLAND: EKSTRAKLASA

Long wait over in Wroclaw

Sensing victory...Slask Wroclaw supporters

After a wait of 35 years, Slask Wroclaw finally collected their second Polish title, winning 1-0 away to defending champions Wisla in Krakow with a goal from Slovenian defender Rok Elsner.

It was also a second league win for Slask's Orest Lenczyk – at 69 the oldest coach in the top flight – who took charge in September 2010 with a remit to avoid relegation. There was a 34-year gaps between his two titles: he had led Wisla to the title in 1978 – with victory sealed in the same stadium.

Although Slask had led the table at the winter break, they started the second half of the season with an early 4-0 home defeat at the hands of Legia Warsaw, who were themselves top of the pile with five games to go.

With two rounds left, only two points separated Slask, Legia, Ruch Chorzow and Lech Poznan. In their penultimate game, Legia lost 1-0 away to Lechia Gdansk. Slask had taken advantage by beating Jagiellonia Bialystok 3-1 and then ensured the title and a place in next season's Champions League second qualifying round with victory against Wisla.

Second-place Ruch Chorzow were the season's surprise package, with coach Waldemar Fornalik saying: "For us, this runners-up position is like a title." He built a solid team that also reached the Final of the Polish Cup, where they were beaten 3-0 by Legia.

Despite their cup victory it was a disappointing campaign for third-place Legia, who have released winter transfer-window recruits, Nacho Novo from Sporting Gijon and Argentinian striker Ismael Blanco, and will be expected to go on a recruitment drive this summer.

Ruch and Legia are joined in next term's Europa League by Lech Poznan, who won seven out of their last nine games to take fourth place but will be without the league's top scorer next season after 22-goal Latvian striker Artjoms Rudnevs joined Hamburg.

Polonia Warsaw, who finished sixth, face an uncertain future after their eccentric owner, construction millionaire Jozef Wojciechowski, declared he would "totally withdraw my interest from football". Wojciechowski, who has sacked 18 coaches since taking over in 2006, said "there are too many hyenas and thieves in this business".

LKS Lodz and Cracovia were relegated, with LKS wanting to withdraw from the competition before the spring part of the season due to financial problems.

Dariusz Kurowski

● *For league table, see page 109*

Saved...Korona Kielce keeper Zbigniew Malkowski stops Legia's Michal Zyro (in white)

Overachieving...Fornalik

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
ARKADIUSZ PIECH
(Ruch Chorzow)
A solid, speedy forward who was on target 12 times in the league.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
RAFAL WOLSKI (Legia Warsaw)
Skilful, attacking midfielder who made huge progress during the season.

COACH OF THE SEASON
WALDEMAR FORNALIK
(Ruch Chorzow)
Confirmed his class by taking second spot with a decidedly average team.

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PORTUGAL: PRIMEIRA LIGA

Pereira's Porto stay on top

At home...Porto are crowned league champions once again after beating Sporting Lisbon 2-0 at the Estadio Dragao

Porto's dominance of the domestic championship continued as they won their sixth title in seven seasons – their 26th in all – despite the departure of coach Andre Villas-Boas to Chelsea.

Chelsea had paid more than £12million to release Villas-Boas from his contract last summer and Porto did not look far for a replacement, encouraging Vitor Pereira, who had been Villas-Boas' assistant in their treble-winning 2010-11 season, to step up.

However, despite an impressive start, which included winning the Portuguese Super Cup, Pereira struggled to emulate his predecessor. Porto were squeezed out of their Champions League group by the modest APOEL of Cyprus, and when they dropped into the Europa League they fared little better, losing comprehensively to Manchester United.

Cup winner...Academica's Marinho

A remarkable run of 55 league games unbeaten over 703 days ended in January when Porto lost 3-1 at Gil Vicente. It meant they had fallen just one game short of equalling Benfica's record of 56 games without loss.

Meanwhile, Benfica were themselves putting together a strong challenge. In the Champions League they edged out Manchester United from their group and saw off Zenit in the first knockout round. They were then unlucky to lose to eventual winners Chelsea in the quarter-finals.

By now Benfica were still ahead in the title race at home, having held a five-point lead over Porto at the halfway stage. However, Porto's fortunes changed for the better with the return of Argentinian midfielder Lucho Gonzalez from Marseille in the January transfer window. They rallied with key away victories over Benfica (3-2 in March) and Braga (2-1 in April) to confirm their dominant position.

"The last title is always the best one," said president Jorge Nuno Pinto da Costa, who has now led the club to 19 league triumphs. "This one is well deserved after a lot of hard work."

Pushed to the wire

Braga, the 2011 Europa League finalists, pushed Porto and Benfica to the wire. They were powered by the goals of Brazilian striker Lima, who finished as the league top scorer, along with Benfica's Oscar Cardozo, with 20 goals. At the end of the season Braga parted company with coach Leonardo Jardim "by mutual consent".

Braga had lost coach Domingos Paciencia to Sporting last summer, but he struggled to make an impact in Lisbon and in February, with his team fourth and 16 points behind leaders Benfica after a 2-0 away loss to Maritimo, he was fired.

Sporting turned to former international Ricardo Sa Pinto, who lifted the mood and steered the club to the Europa League semi-finals, where they were knocked out by Athletic Bilbao.

Sporting still finished a distant fourth in the league but they saw off the challenge of Maritimo, who also qualified for next season's Europa League.

Sporting had a great chance to collect some silverware but were stunned by Academica in the Portuguese Cup Final. Academica, who only just avoided relegation, won a first trophy in their 73-year history and earned direct entry to the group stages of next season's Europa League.

Feirense and Leiria were relegated, with the latter suffering from huge debts. In a league game, against Feirense, in April, Leiria could only field eight players after 16 other squad members had resigned over unpaid wages.

John Holmesdale

● *For league table, see page 109*

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
HULK (Porto)
The powerful Brazilian forward and club captain scored in several key victories as Porto retained their title.

COACH OF THE SEASON
VITOR PEREIRA (Porto)
The former assistant answered his critics as Porto peaked at the right time in the title race.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
NELSON OLIVEIRA (Benfica)
The 20-year-old forward played his way into Portugal's Euro 2012 squad despite only making his full league debut in March.

Euro-bound...Oliveira

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RUSSIA: PREMIER LEAGUE

Zenit rule again before change

Returning hero...Zenit's on-loan Arshavin is mobbed by fans celebrating the St Petersburg club's second-successive championship

The Premier League's transitional season saw the emergence of some new contenders but with a familiar face claiming top spot. CSKA Moscow's impressive summer lead of seven points was slowly whittled away, allowing Zenit to overhaul them by the close of the regular season.

The league then split into two groups, with the bottom eight playing each other home and away to sort out the relegation places, and the top eight battling it out to determine the champions and the qualifiers for European competition.

Zenit's Italian coach, Luciano Spalletti, once again demonstrated his magic touch, leading them to the title with a 13-point cushion over runners-up Spartak Moscow.

Still top dog on the pitch, Zenit found their position as Russia's richest club under threat. Anzhi Makhachkala and their new owner, oligarch Suleiman Kerimov, made a string of sensational signings, including the £23.5million purchase from Internazionale of Samuel Eto'o. Anzhi were rewarded with a fifth-place finish and their first-ever European qualification.

Hiddink...made a big-money move

The man credited with their on-field success was former national coach Guus Hiddink who joined Anzhi in February, reportedly on a £7m-a-year deal, which has subsequently been upped by a further million.

Foreign recruits

Once again, local coaches were treated harshly in favour of big-money foreign recruits. Incredibly, Anzhi replaced Yuri Krasnozhan after the winter break without even giving him a chance to lead the team in a single competitive game.

Along the same lines, Valeri Karpin, who had combined the roles of coach and general director at Spartak, lost his coaching job despite securing second place and a Champions League berth ahead of arch-rivals CSKA. It soon emerged that his replacement would be Unai Emery, the outgoing coach at Valencia.

CSKA's Leonid Slutskiy, often dubbed "the Russian Mourinho", is another who may need to look over his shoulder. The third-placed Red Army team failed to maintain their early-season form and lost many of their key games in the play-off stage. One bright spot, however, was the impressive form of Seydou Doumbia. The Ivory Coast international found the net 28 times and finished five goals ahead of Zenit's Alexander Kezhakov in the scoring charts.

Between the posts, Zenit's Vyacheslav Malafeev recovered from the tragedy of losing his wife in a car accident last year to leave CSKA's Igor Akinfeev trailing in his wake as the league's goalkeeper of the season and claim the annual Lev Yashin prize.

Dynamo Moscow, who produced some of the league's most entertaining football early on, started to stumble after the new-year break and had to settle for fourth spot. They weren't helped by a series of internal conflicts which saw key players Igor Semshov and Andrei Voronin miss several games. Despite struggling for form, Dynamo's German striker Kevin Kuranyi did bag one of the season's best goals with an overhead bicycle kick against local rivals Lokomotiv Moscow.

Slaven Bilic was initially announced as a replacement for Dynamo manager Sergei Silkin once his responsibilities with the Croatian national team at Euro 2012 were over, but instead he opted to sign a contract with Lokomotiv. They had fired Jose Couceiro after finishing in a disappointing seventh place. "Iron Lady" Olga Smorodskay, the only woman to be president of a Russian club, had no mercy on the Portuguese coach despite the club's impressive mid-season winning streak.

Two-times Russian champions Rubin Kazan compensated for a disappointing sixth-place finish by beating Dynamo 1-0 to win the Russian Cup. Last year's new boys Kuban continued to progress by finishing in the top eight.

At the other end of the table, Tom and Spartak-Nalchik filled the relegation places and will be replaced next season by Mordoviya Saransk and Alaniya Vladikavkaz.

The new season will begin in July and the Russian League will now follow the schedule of most European leagues, finishing their season in the spring.

Victor Gusev

● *For league table, see page 110*

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
IGOR DENISOV
(Zenit St Petersburg)
Acting as a highly efficient barrier in front of the back four, he played a key role in Zenit's second successive league title.

MANAGER OF THE SEASON
DAN PETRESCU
(Kuban Krasnodar)
After leading the team to the First Division title in his first season in charge, the ex-Romania defender then guided Krasnodar to a place in the elite top-eight play-offs.

Big impact...teen star Ozdoev

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
MAGOMED OZDOEV
(Lokomotiv Moscow)
Born in the Chechen capital of Grozny, the 19-year-old midfielder made a big impact after joining from Dinamo Kiev and earned a call-up to the national team.

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SCOTLAND: PREMIER LEAGUE

Celtic triumph at a canter

Cock-a-hoops...Lennon and his delighted Celtic side celebrate winning the SPL trophy

Celtic were the runaway SPL champions as manager Neil Lennon secured his first title and broke Rangers' three-season stranglehold. It was a remarkable turnaround for a team that in November had languished 15 points behind their Glasgow rivals.

The watershed moment came a month earlier when, 3-0 down to Kilmarnock at half-time, Lennon's job was on the line. The Hoops clawed back the deficit to draw 3-3 and they would go on to record a 17-match winning streak, finishing with a 20-point lead and with a month to spare.

Half of that lead came from a 10-point penalty imposed on Rangers for financial irregularities. The escalating crisis at Ibrox was the dominant theme of the season, and ensured that Ally McCoist's first term at the helm was a torrid one. As Craig Whyte's controversial 2011 takeover began to unravel, with £9million accrued in outstanding taxes and a queue of other unpaid creditors, the club was placed in administration in February. Players agreed to take up to a 75 per cent pay cut in order to safeguard the club's short-term future, but there continued to be a very real possibility that the 140-year old club would cease to exist in its current form.

A host of prospective buyers came forward – including a consortium, the Blue Knights, led by former director Paul Murray and Brian Kennedy, owner of rugby union club Sale Sharks. Briefly, salvation seemed at hand in the form of US trucking tycoon Bill Miller, who was given preferred bidder status by the administrators; but he pulled out at the last minute on closer scrutiny of the club's balance sheet.

Cheerier tales

There were cheerier tales elsewhere, with several clubs over-achieving on slender resources. Stuart McCall's Motherwell finished third – which, given Rangers' European ban, means entry into next season's Champions League qualifiers for the first time; Kilmarnock defied the odds to outwit Celtic in the League Cup Final, capturing their first trophy in 15 years; and St Johnstone entertained their way to a spot in the Europa League.

Dundee United enjoyed another solid season under Peter Houston and secured European football again by virtue of a fourth-placed finish. They might have fared better had it not been for a poor start to the campaign, in which they won only two of their first 12 games.

For Aberdeen there was more disappointment and another ninth place finish, though – unlike last term – relegation was never a real threat. But it was for Hibernian, who endured a terrible time in the league. Colin Calderwood was sacked as manager in November and his replacement, Pat Fenlon, was unable to stem the decline, despite the return of former favourites Ivan Sproule and Garry O'Connor. That Hibs dodged the drop was due to the wretched form of Dunfermline Athletic, who managed to win just one of their 19 home games.

The Scottish Cup offered Hibs some relief when they beat Celtic to reach the Final against Edinburgh rivals Hearts. But hopes of a fiercely contested affair were soon dashed as Hearts swept to a 5-1 victory.

Already assured of a place in the Europa League thanks to a fifth-place finish, Hearts' cup victory means they will now enter the competition at a later stage, one round before the group phase. It also opened the Europa League back door to sixth-placed St Johnstone, who impressed under new manager Steve Lomas.

Despite leading Hearts to silverware, their manager Paulo Sergio ended the season unsure of a new contract. Owner Vladimir Romanov appears to have other priorities, having confirmed plans to sell the club, although he has yet to find a taker at his mooted £50million asking price.

As for Rangers, new prospective buyers have emerged in the form of a consortium headed by former Sheffield United owner, Charles Green, though the club's future remains far from clear. A new start in the third division has not been ruled out. If, as is more likely, they stay in the SPL, it will be in a very different guise, with a squad, pared of high-earners, that will struggle to keep pace with the other half of the Old Firm.

The 2011-12 season looks set to go down in history as one that reshaped the Scottish football map.

Dan Brennan

● *For league table, see page 110*

Shiels...success on a shoestring

MANAGER OF THE SEASON
KENNY SHIELS (Kilmarnock)
Despite a shoestring budget, the Northern Irishman masterminded victory over Celtic in the Scottish League Cup Final to secure Killie's first trophy since 1997. Refreshingly outspoken, he has built a team that is solid and entertaining in equal measure.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
GARY HOOPER (Celtic)
The former Scunthorpe United striker confirmed his growing stature with 29 goals, including five in a final flourish against Hearts. English clubs are now circling, with an international call-up not inconceivable.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
RUDI SKACEL (Hearts)
The Czech returned for a second spell in Scotland after five years away. As in 2006, he was instrumental in a Scottish Cup triumph, scoring twice in the Final to take his season's total to 16 goals from midfield.

Demolition derby...Darren Barr (centre) scores for Hearts in Cup Final win over Hibs

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SERBIA: SUPERLIGA

Partizan's record five in a row

In winning the league title for a fifth consecutive season, Partizan Belgrade achieved what no other club had ever done before, either in Serbia or when it was part of the former Yugoslavia.

In truth, Partizan did not play spectacular football, especially in the second half of the season, but their success was nevertheless fully deserved. A gap of 12 points separated them and runners-up Red Star Belgrade, but their triumph was overshadowed by turbulence in the ranks during the winter break. Aleksandar Stanojevic, the coach who led the club in the 2010-11 Champions League and won the double in the same season, left after falling out with club president Dragan Duric. Sports director Mladen Krstajic was also sacked.

At the peak of the conflict, Krstajic and Stanojevic both asked their boss to resign, but Duric held firm and the "revolution" ended with their departure. Partizan surprisingly turned to former Chelsea manager Avram Grant to be their new coach, but in the opening stages of the spring campaign things didn't go smoothly. By mid-March, Red Star had reduced the 10-point winter-break gap to six. That Partizan managed to stay on top was largely due to Red Star, whose form began to tail off.

Partizan's key players were midfielders Zvonimir Vukic and Stefan Babovic, Bulgarian central defender Ivan Ivanov and young striker Lazar Markovic, who despite a late-season lapse in form was a revelation back in the autumn.

Despite the title triumph, three defeats by Red Star proved unforgivable and Grant, who wasn't popular with the supporters or the media, has now been replaced by Vladimir Vermezovic.

Red Star again failed to break the domination of their arch-rivals, but found consolation in winning the Serbian Cup, with 2-0 victory over Borac Cacak in the Final – and those three spring victories over Partizan. They won 2-0 in both legs of the cup semi-finals and then won 1-0 in the league away at Partizan Stadium.

Over the season, Red Star's displays were far from impressive, but they at least planned for the future by introducing and signing several promising domestic players. Nikola Maksimovic, Filip Mladenovic, Srdan Mijailovic, Luka Milivojevic, Luka Milunovic and Filip Kasalica all did well and coach Robert Prosinecki insists that next year they will be champions.

Derby...Partizan's Markovic (left) beats Mijailovic of Red Star in the Cup semi-final

Biggest disappointment

Without doubt, the biggest disappointment were Vojvodina. After a good autumn campaign – eight wins, six draws and only one defeat – that climaxed with an impressive 2-0 away victory over Red Star, the club from Novi Sad struggled in the spring, mostly as a result of a poor transfer policy in the winter break.

"The players who left the club last winter scored 15 goals in the first part of the season, while those who were bought will not score 15 goals in the next four years," coach Dejan Vukicevic said after he decided to leave.

"The players who stayed were frustrated with the fact that the new signings were much better-paid and that was reflected in the atmosphere in the dressing room."

Midfielder Slobodan Medojevic was transferred to Wolfsburg, Georgian playmaker Giorgi Merebashvili went back to Dynamo Tbilisi and striker Brana Ilic signed for Aktobe of Kazakhstan. In came former Partizan midfielder Almami Moreira from China's Dalian Aerbin, ex-Ghana captain Stephen Appiah and young striker Aleksandar Katai, who returned on loan from Olympiakos.

Apart from five defeats and four draws in the league, Vojvodina crashed out of the cup semi-finals against Borac Cacak, missing out on the chance to play in the Final in their own stadium. A few days after their elimination, the club suddenly informed the Serbian FA that they couldn't stage the Final, allegedly because of renovation work needed to prepare the ground for a European Under-19 tournament in late May.

Other underachievers were Rad and OFK Belgrade, both normally contenders for Europa League places, but this season left treading water in mid-table.

The biggest surprises were promoted Radnicki 1923 in sixth place, Sloboda (fifth) and Jagodina, whose fourth-place finish clinched them a spot in the Europa League qualifiers. Promoted Novi Pazar managed to retain their top-flight status, while Borac Cacak and Metalac Gornji Milanovac were relegated. They will be replaced by Radnicki Nis and Donji Srem.

Overall, the level of play across the league was disappointingly low. Confirmation of this came in the form of the league's top scorer. Darko Spalevic, who scored 18 goals for Radnicki 1923, is 35 and was a flop at Red Star 10 years ago, before earning his money at smaller clubs in Bulgaria, Russia, Hungary, China and Bosnia.

Vladimir Novak

● *For league table, see page 110*

Vital...Vukic pulled the strings

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
ZVONIMIR VUKIC (Partizan)
He pulled the strings in midfield and was the club's top scorer with 13 goals.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
FILIP KOSTIC (Radnicki 1923)
The 19-year-old left winger impressed with a series of strong performances, and chipped in with nine assists and three goals. Next season he will play for Groningen in Holland.

COACH OF THE SEASON
SIMO KRUNIC (Jagodina)
The former coach of OFK Belgrade and Bosnia's Zeljeznicar guided Jagodina, against all the odds, to a splendid fourth place – the biggest success in the club's history.

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SWITZERLAND: SUPER LEAGUE
Basle triumph in turbulent season

Grounded...Xhaka of Basle (left) beats Moreno Costanzo of Young Boys to the ball

While Basle did the league and cup double, no Swiss side got beyond the last 16 in European competition and the national team failed to qualify for Euro 2012. That may sound like another run-of-the-mill season in boring old Switzerland – yet it was anything but.

The season also saw a 36-point deduction for Sion, the country threatened with an international ban, Servette filing for bankruptcy, Neuchatel Xamax kicked out of the league and the club's Russian owner thrown into jail. Added to all that there was the Grasshopper-Zurich derby being abandoned because of rioting fans and a player being served with an eight-match ban for an incident involving a ball boy.

All this had Swiss officials cringing with embarrassment and praying for the summer break – all two months of it. It also prompted a tightening up of the licensing regulations for next season, which resulted in four top-flight clubs – including Young Boys and Zurich – having their initial applications rejected by the authorities.

It was the Sion affair which brought Swiss football into the international spotlight and ended up distorting the whole competition. Banned from signing players for two transfer windows after they poached a player from an Egyptian club in 2008, the club owned by architect and former goalkeeper Christian Constantin defiantly made six new signings last summer while the ban was still in force.

Predictably, Sion were banned from fielding the new arrivals by the Swiss Football League (SFL), but the players won a court order guaranteeing them the right to play. Even though this violated FIFA statutes, the SFL backed down. Sion then decided to play with fire by including the players in a Europa League play-off against Celtic, which they won 3-1 on aggregate, only to be ejected by UEFA for fielding ineligible players.

This led to a flurry of legal action from Sion, who won an injunction from a court in the canton of Vaud ordering their reinstatement. At one point UEFA president Michel Platini had to appear before a public prosecutor in Lausanne to explain why he had not complied with the order.

Eventually, all the court orders which had initially gone Sion's way were revoked and FIFA threatened the Swiss federation with an international ban if the club were not punished. Sion were therefore deducted 36 points which, naturally, sent them to the bottom of the table. Although not for long...

Over at Neuchatel Xamax, Chechen oligarch Bulat Chagaev's turbulent eight-month reign came to an unhappy end.

Having sacked four coaches, the entire administrative staff and threatened his players with violence, Chagaev got his club kicked out of the league for a series of irregularities – the most serious being that he forged a letter from the Bank of America which claimed he had £30million in his account and was fit to fund the club. Shortly afterwards, Chagaev was arrested and jailed.

Servette came close to following Neuchatel out of the league after their owner, Iranian businessman Majid Pishyar, filed for bankruptcy. However, they were rescued when Canadian businessman Hugh Quennec, owner of a local ice hockey team, bought the club. Seventeen-times champions Servette were in the top flight for the first time since 2005 – the year in which they went bankrupt and were demoted to the third tier.

Tainted win

The outcome of all this was that Neuchatel officially finished 10th. Sion were ninth, forcing them into a two-leg relegation play-off against second division runners-up Aarau which they won 3-1 on aggregate. Even this was tainted as Sion were allowed to field their captain, Serey Die, even though he had just been given an eight-match ban for slapping a ball boy.

Sion appealed the suspension and, under the league's generous rules, Die was allowed to continue playing until the hearing.

Meanwhile, Basle ran away with the title, wrapping things up with a 3-1 win over Lausanne Sport. They went on to win the Cup Final on penalties over Lucerne following a 1-1 draw to complete a second double in the last three seasons.

Basle finished a whopping 20 points clear of runners-up Lucerne as they won their third successive league title and the sixth in the last nine seasons. To their credit, Basle achieved their dominance through good administration rather than simply throwing money around and should be in good shape when Financial Fairplay comes into action.

They also reached the Champions League last 16 with memorable home wins against Manchester United and Bayern Munich along the way. Sadly, the lasting impression was a 7-0 defeat by the Bavarians.

Basle's achievements came despite losing coach Thorsten Fink, who left to join Hamburg and was replaced by assistant Heiko Vogel.

Lucerne managed to upset their fans along the way by banning flags and banners at their newly refurbished stadium, The supporters protested by turning up in black at a couple of home games and refusing to sing.

Young Boys finished third but only after firing former Tottenham Hotspur and Stuttgart manager Christian Gross. Servette, for all their problems, took fourth place and a Europa League spot.

Brian Homewood

● *For league table, see page 111*

In trouble...Sion's Die (centre)

High flyer...Vogel

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
XHERDAN SHAQIRI (Basle)
His impish skills continue to stand out and his bicycle-kick against Lucerne was the goal of the season. On his way to Bayern Munich this summer.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
GRANIT XHAKA (Basle)
The 19-year-old is an exceptional prospect: a deep-lying, left-footed midfielder who can put in aggressive tackles and has an excellent eye for a pass. Snapped up by Borussia Monchengladbach – which could be a far more sensible move than Shaqiri's.

COACH OF THE SEASON
HEIKO VOGEL (Basle)
Got off to a flying start after stepping up to the job of first-team coach and was unbeaten in his first 26 league matches.

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UKRAINE: PREMIER LEAGUE

Shakhtar win tainted by ref blunders

Inspirational...Shakhtar skipper Srna has now won the Ukrainian Cup three times

The 2011-12 season turned out to be one of the most intriguing for years, with some claiming it was the dirtiest since the championship began 20 years ago. Dynamo Kiev, coached by 65-year-old Russian Yuri Semin, were unbeaten and led for almost the whole campaign until their meeting with fierce rivals Shakhtar Donetsk at the Donbass Arena. They had won 10 games in a row and had a three-point lead with three games remaining.

Unfortunately, the game was marred by referee Yuri Vaks' mistakes. Three minutes before half-time, with the score 0-0, Dynamo midfielder Denys Harmash, who had already been booked, was shown a second yellow card as Vaks wrongly asserted that he had left the pitch without permission. Mayhem followed the decision, with Dynamo coach Semin sent from the bench.

Harmash's unjustified dismissal, which was later confirmed by a disciplinary committee, proved to be the turning point as Dynamo lost 2-0 thanks to goals from Ukraine international defender Yaroslav Rakytskyi and Brazilian playmaker Alex Teixera.

With their coach banned for the rest of the season, and without key midfielder Harmash, Dynamo dropped points in their remaining games. That paved the road for the third successive title for Shakhtar.

"It was the dirtiest championship for 20 years," said Dynamo president Ihor Surkis. "I can't congratulate Shakhtar."

Shakhtar officially clinched the title on the final day of the season by thrashing already relegated Alexandria 3-0. They later added the Cup, beating city rivals Metalurh 2-1 after extra time.

It was a season littered by controversy for the club owned by Ukraine's richest oligarch, Rinat Akhmetov. After last season's progress to the quarter-finals of the Champions League, the club with a budget of more than £50million failed to impress in Europe, finishing bottom in the group stages of the competition.

In the domestic League they were behind Dynamo Kiev for almost the campaign, only catching the team from the capital after the aforementioned game.

Few believed Shakhtar would win the league after Romanian coach Mircea Lucescu sustained injuries in a car crash in Bucharest in January. But he returned in time to steer the side to top spot, and he was helped by the fact that Shakhtar have leaders in every department: Croatian right-winger and skipper Darijo Srna, the best assist-provider in the league Willian, and the league's top scorer Yevhen Seleznyov, who shared the trophy with Volyn's Brazilian striker Maicon on 14 goals.

Sixth yet again

Metalist finished third for the sixth season in succession. Coach Myron Markevych, supported by billionaire owner Alexander Yaroslavsky, preferred the Europa League campaign to the title race. They have one of the strongest squads in the league – with Brazilians Cleiton Xavier and Taison and Argentinians Jose Ernesto Sosa and Jonathan Cristaldo – but were again unable to maintain a sustained challenge.

The Spanish coach of Dnipro, Juande Ramos, failed to find the right balance in his squad, with inconsistent form from Juliano, Yevhen Konopliyanka and Croatian forward Nikola Kalinic.

Arsenal Kiev were the revelation of the season as Leonid Kuchuk's side played quality football, with key roles for ex-Dynamo Kiev star Maxim Shatskikh, Georgia international midfielder Kakhaber Kobakhidze and Romanian striker Ionut Mazilu.

Tavriya gambled on experience but they failed to last the course and lost their battle for a Europa League spot to Arsenal.

Metalurh Donetsk were a typical mid-table side but gained a lucky ticket to the Europa League by reaching the Ukraine Cup for the first time in their history and losing to city rivals Shakhtar.

Vorskla again relied on the coaching talent of Mykola Pavlov who worked with limited resources to steer his side to the middle of the table.

Promoted Chornomorets from the seaside city of Odessa avoided a relegation battle largely thanks to increased support in their new 30,000-capacity stadium.

Something strange happened with Kryvbas, who were fifth at the winter break but failed to win a game thereafter.

Anatoliy Demyanenko, a Dynamo Kiev star of the 1980s, was hired by Volyn during the winter break, and justified his recruitment by keeping the modest side in the top division.

Illichivets stayed up for another season, largely thanks to good relations with neighbours Shakhtar, who loaned them 15 players.

Karpaty Lviv dropped into the relegation zone following the retirement of Belarus coach Oleg Kononov early in the season, but they survived an intense battle with Obolon and Alexandria, who had been clear candidates for relegation right from the start.

Oleg Zadernovsky

● *For league table, see page 111*

Powerful...Yarmolenko

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
ANDRIY YARMOLENKO (Dynamo Kiev)
The powerful right winger had a great campaign, contributing 12 league goals.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
BROWN IDEYE (Dynamo Kiev)
The Nigerian target man, signed from Sochaux, fully justified his recruitment with 14 goals in all competitions.

COACH OF THE SEASON
LEONID KUCHUK (Arsenal Kiev)
He performed wonders in his first season with the modest club from the capital, guiding them to the Europa League.

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LIBERTADORES CUP

Big names dominate the last eight

As the Libertadores Cup moved into the quarter-final stage perhaps the biggest surprise this year has been the lack of surprises.

All of the last eight have justified ambitions of victory, with six of them having reached at least the semi-finals since 2006. The only exceptions are Brazil's Corinthians and Vasco da Gama.

After the blip of last year, when eventual champions Santos were Brazil's only quarter-finalists, the country has hit back in 2012, providing four of the last eight teams, just as it had in 2009 and 2010. And after three barren years with just one quarter-finalist, Argentina has two – which is no shock given the return of Boca Juniors after a two-year absence and the recent progress of Velez Sarsfield. Completing the field are Paraguay's Libertad and Universidad de Chile.

Some big-hitters said goodbye after the first knockout round.

Atletico Nacional of Colombia had invested heavily, signing 18 players, and started in magnificent style, with their 4-0 win away to Penarol in the group phase being a tournament highlight. But they lost midfielder Jhon Edwar Valoy to injury in that game and never achieved the same balance between attack and defence without him. Results suffered, especially in the domestic championship, and pressure mounted on coach Santiago Escobar, who was sacked on the eve of their last-16 tie against Velez Sarsfield, who took advantage to sneak through 2-1 on aggregate.

Aerial assault...Pablo Velazquez (second left) scores with a header from a set-piece for Libertad against Cruz Azul in Mexico

Brazilian showdown...Fluminense's Carlinhos leaps over Dagoberto of Internacional

Argentina's third force in this year's competition, Lanus, enjoyed some excellent moments, especially when veteran Uruguayan striker Mario Regueiro was on form, and they pushed Vasco all the way before going out on penalties. A Brazilian team also fell, with Internacional going down 2-1 to compatriots Fluminense. Inter enjoyed the balance of play, but Jesus Datolo missed a first-leg penalty and they paid a high price in the return for an inability to defend in the air against the free-kicks of Thiago Neves.

Mexico's Cruz Azul boasted one of the competition's most dangerous strikers in Javier Orozco, but they also crumbled against the high ball and all the goals they conceded in their 3-1 aggregate defeat to Libertad were headers from set-pieces.

Decent fight

Elsewhere, Chile's Union Espanola put up a decent fight, with their front three having some joy against Boca before going down 5-3, while Bolivar claimed the plaudits for becoming the first Bolivian side to make it out of the group phase since 2000, and even beat Santos 2-1 in the home leg.

The return game was always likely to be interesting. Under Argentinian coach Angel Guillermo Hoyos, Bolivar played adventurous football, but left themselves alarmingly open in the process. It worked away from home in all of their group games, but against the quality of Santos such an approach left little margin for error and the Brazilians won 8-0.

Ecuador's Deportivo Quito were also left licking their wounds after a 6-0 second-leg mauling by Universidad de Chile. At altitude they were always strong, stretching

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Clash...Universidad de Chile's Eugenio Mena (right) and Deportivo's Juan Carlos Paredes

the opposition with the long ball to Fidel Martinez on the left wing and with Argentinian striker Matias Alustiza on fire. They had won the home leg 4-1 and were confident of reaching the last eight, only to see their advantage evaporate in Santiago before half-time.

Compatriots Emelec also fell, unable to breach a Corinthians defence behind which new keeper Cassio excelled.

After a 0-0 draw in Guayaquil they went three goals down in Sao Paulo and this time there was no miracle comeback. Emelec had snatched a place in the knockout round by winning their last two group games in stoppage time.

The second – against Olimpia of Paraguay – effectively knocked out Flamengo, the first Brazilian side to fall at this stage since 2007. Ronaldinho and company had completed their game, and waited on the pitch while first Olimpia scored a goal that saved them, and then Emelec went straight down the other end to administer the killer blow. Ronaldinho was only fitfully effective, and with a huge gap between attack and defence Fla conceded too many goals.

Last year's quarter-finalists Universidad Catolica of Chile were also disappointing, as were 2011 finalists Penarol of Uruguay, who quickly succumbed in a difficult group. Indeed, Uruguayan participation ended after the group stage, with Nacional and Defensor also eliminated, although both could look back on some good moments.

The same could not be said for Peru and Venezuela, the other two countries who failed to get a team through to the knockout round – for the second consecutive year in the case of the Peruvians, and the third for the Venezuelans.

The Peruvian clubs are mired in financial crisis and Alianza Lima even lost players during the competition over unpaid wages.

The Venezuelan teams were even worse, with neither Deportivo Tachira or Zamora managing a win and the latter failing to score. This comes at a time of unprecedented success for the national team, which has put Venezuelan players in the spotlight as never before. The resultant exodus has weakened the domestic league at the very time when new stadiums have been built and the first division has been expanded.

The fate of Venezuela's clubs is an object lesson of the difficulties in launching a domestic league in the age of globalised football.

Tim Vickery

OFC O-LEAGUE
Kiwis triumph again

Auckland City's greater experience proved decisive as they beat Tefana of Tahiti 3-1 on aggregate in the O-League Final to retain the Oceania Champions League title and be crowned continental champions for a fourth time.

Spanish coach Ramon Tribulietx will now take his side to Japan in December for the Club World Cup.

Two goals in the opening hour – from much-travelled midfielder David Mulligan and the impressive Daniel Koprovic – put the Kiwi side in control of the first leg, only for sub Axel Williams to snatch a vital away goal for the visitors with 20 minutes remaining.

High hopes

Tefana had opened their campaign with a 10-0 thrashing away to Waitakere United in New Zealand, but still managed to top Group A and qualify for the Final after beating the Kiwis in the return on their artificial pitch at the Stade Louis Ganivet in Faaa. With Auckland City as unaccustomed to the surface as their compatriots, hopes were high in Tahiti that the country's first-ever finalists could become only the second non-Kiwi side – after Papua New Guinea's Hekari United in 2010 – to win the Oceania title.

However, the visitors' resolute defence, ably marshalled by veteran World Cup campaigner Ivan Vicelic, confined Tefana to a solitary chance, which Williams wasted when faced with an open goal. Content to limit themselves to the occasional counter-attack, City made certain of victory through Manuel Exposito just before half-time and held on despite Alex Feneridis' dismissal midway through the second half for elbowing an opponent.

Spanish striker Exposito's goal in the second leg was his sixth of the tournament and earned him the golden boot – he finished one ahead of Waitakere United's Roy Krishna – while fellow Spaniard and team-mate Albert Riera was named the O-League player of the season.

"We knew it was going to be tight and in the end one goal was enough for us," said Tribulietx after the second leg of the Final. "I think we deserved it when you look at the work we have put in over the season, and we are very happy."

His side won the title despite losing 1-0 to Amicale of Vanuatu in the group stage – their first defeat in the tournament in 25 matches, a run that stretched back over five seasons. They were also held to a 1-1 draw by Hekari United in the early phase.

Paul Moon

Experienced...Mulligan (in blue) takes control of matters in the first leg of the Final

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ANDORRA

Finishing on a high

League runners-up Santa Coloma denied Lusitans a domestic double, beating them 1-0 in the Andorran Cup Final with an own goal from Luis Filipe Pinto shortly before half-time.

"Although disappointed to have finished as runners-up in the league, victory in the cup means we have ended the season on a high note," said Santa Coloma coach Luis Blanco.

AZERBAIJAN

Champions again

Neftchi retained their Premier League title and will enter next season's Champions League at the second qualifying round. However, goals from Koke and Juninho denied them the double as they were beaten 2-0 by Baku in the Cup Final.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Hard work rewarded

Zeljeznicar won their second league title in three years and then beat Siroki Brijeg 1-0 on aggregate to take the Bosnian Cup.

Much of their success was down to goalkeeper Adnan Guso, who came out of retirement in the autumn and went 1,246 minutes without conceding a goal in all competitions. The club are also unbeaten in 27 games in the domestic cup – a sequence that now spans three seasons.

"We are the evidence that in this country work and only work can lead to success," said title-winning coach Amar Osmin.

Return...veteran keeper Guso

Club Results

EUROPE

ALBANIA

ALBANIA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Skenderbeu (C)	26	17	6	3	45	16	57
Teuta	26	17	5	4	33	18	56
Tirana	26	16	5	5	33	21	53
Flamurtari	26	13	7	6	42	20	46
Kastrioti	26	11	5	10	37	30	38
Vllaznia	26	10	5	11	39	33	35
Bylis	26	9	8	9	40	37	35
Laci[1]	26	11	7	8	26	28	34
Shkumbini	26	8	7	11	37	45	31
Tomori[2]	26	8	4	14	36	47	28
Kamza (R)[2]	26	7	6	13	22	32	27
Apolonia[2]	26	5	6	15	27	46	21
Pogradeci[3] (R)	26	6	4	16	25	47	19
Dinamo[4] (R)	26	3	7	16	19	41	13

[1]6pts deducted because of crowd trouble
[2]Kamza relegated after losing rel/prom play-off; Tomori and Apolonia stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off
[3]3pts deducted because of crowd trouble
[4]3pts deducted for failing to pay a player

AUSTRIA

Apr 28: Austria 3 Wacker 0; Mattersburg 0 Salzburg 1; Sturm 2 Kapfenberger 1; Wiener Neustadt 1 Admira 4.
Apr 29: Ried 2 Rapid 3.
May 5: Wiener Neustadt 0 Sturm 0; Kapfenberger 0 Ried 0; Admira 3 Austria 2; Wacker 3 Mattersburg 6.
May 6: Rapid 0 Salzburg 1.
May 10: Salzburg 2 Kapfenberger 0; Austria 3 Wiener Neustadt 1; Ried 1 Wacker 1; Mattersburg 0 Rapid 1; Sturm 0 Admira 3.
May 13: Kapfenberger 0 Rapid 2; Wacker 1 Sturm 1; Wiener Neustadt 1 Salzburg 5; Admira 1 Ried 1; Austria 1 Mattersburg 0.
May 17: Rapid 2 Wacker 0; Ried 2 Wiener Neustadt 2; Mattersburg 2 Kapfenberger 0; Sturm 3 Austria 1; Salzburg 2 Admira 0.

AUSTRIA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg (C)	36	19	11	6	60	30	68
Rapid	36	16	14	6	52	30	62
Admira	36	15	10	11	59	52	55
Austria	36	14	12	10	52	44	54
Sturm	36	12	15	9	47	41	51
Ried	36	11	15	10	44	38	48
Wacker	36	10	15	11	36	45	45
Mattersburg	36	9	11	16	41	43	38
W Neustadt	36	6	15	15	26	51	33
Kapfenb'er (R)	36	5	8	23	21	64	23

AZERBAIJAN

Division split after 22-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

AZERBAIJAN – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Neftchi (C)	32	20	3	9	55	30	63
Khazar	32	17	8	7	44	28	59
Inter	32	16	8	8	29	21	56
Qarabag	32	15	8	9	37	28	53
Qabala	32	15	7	10	43	32	52
Baku	32	15	5	12	42	36	50

AZERBAIJAN – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AZAL	32	12	8	12	44	44	44
Ravan	32	10	11	11	39	39	41
Simurq	32	8	10	14	27	41	34
Kapaz	32	9	5	18	35	55	32
Turan[1]	32	6	7	19	26	42	25
Sumqayit[1]	32	6	6	20	27	52	24

[1]The bottom 2 had been due to be relegated but the FA decided at the end of the season that no clubs would go down

BELGIUM

Division split into championship, Europa League-place and relegation groups after 30-round regular season

Championship group

Apr 27: Genk 0 Anderlecht 4.
Apr 28: Gent 2 Club Brugge 1; Standard 2 Kortrijk 0.
May 1: Club Brugge 2 Standard 0.
May 2: Anderlecht 1 Gent 0; Kortrijk 3 Genk 4.
May 5: Gent 2 Kortrijk 3.
May 6: Anderlecht 1 Club Brugge 1; Standard 2 Genk 3.
May 10: Genk 1 Club Brugge 2; Kortrijk 2 Anderlecht 0; Standard 2 Gent 1.
May 13: Club Brugge 3 Kortrijk 2; Gent 3 Genk 1; Anderlecht 3 Standard 0.

BELGIUM – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP[1] – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht (C)	10	5	3	2	16	8	52
Club Brugge	10	5	2	3	14	11	48
Genk	10	6	0	4	19	19	41
Gent	10	4	0	6	16	16	40
Standard	10	2	3	5	10	17	35
Kortrijk	10	3	2	5	16	20	34

[1]Teams carried forward half the points (rounded up) gained during regular season

Europa League-place groups

Cercle Brugge (Group A winners) beat Mons (Group B winners) in a play-off. Cercle Brugge then lost to Gent (4th placed championship group team) in the final play-off for the Europa League place available through this route

Relegation group

BELGIUM – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Westerlo[2] (R)[3]	4	3	0	1	12	6	12
St Truiden (R)	4	1	0	3	6	12	3

[2]Westerlo were awarded 3 bonus pts for finishing above St Truiden in regular season
[3]Westerlo entered rel/prom play-off group, which they failed to win, meaning they also went down

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zeljeznicar (C)	30	22	5	3	68	17	71
Siroki Brijeg	30	18	9	3	48	17	63
Borac	30	17	4	9	46	26	55
Sarajevo	30	16	6	8	48	31	54
Olimpik	30	15	7	8	44	23	52
Zrinjski	30	12	9	9	47	41	45
Zvijezda	30	13	6	11	37	35	45
Travnik	30	10	5	15	42	53	35
Celik	30	8	10	12	31	39	34
Rudar	30	10	4	16	30	46	34
Velez	30	8	9	13	28	35	33
Leotar	30	9	6	15	27	40	33
GOSK	30	8	9	13	26	43	33
Slavija	30	10	2	18	36	61	32
Sloboda (R)	30	10	2	18	23	48	32
Kozara (R)	30	4	7	19	19	45	19

BULGARIA

BULGARIA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ludogorets (C)	30	22	4	4	73	16	70
CSKA	30	22	3	5	60	19	69
Levski	30	20	2	8	61	28	62
Chernomorets	30	17	9	4	57	23	60
Lovech	30	17	8	5	57	28	59
Lok Plovdiv	30	17	6	7	44	39	57
Cherno More	30	16	4	10	46	25	52
Slavia	30	15	6	9	42	36	51
Minyor	30	8	12	10	35	40	36
Beroe	30	9	8	13	30	37	35
Montana	30	8	7	15	29	51	31
Botev	30	7	8	15	30	44	29
Lok Sofia	30	5	9	16	26	50	24
V-Rakovski (R)	30	3	6	21	19	59	15
Kaliakra (R)	30	2	5	23	26	77	11
Svetkavitsa (R)	30	1	5	24	8	71	8

CROATIA

CROATIA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo (C)	30	23	6	1	73	11	75
Hajduk	30	16	6	8	50	24	54
Slaven	30	14	10	6	41	27	52
Split	30	14	8	8	43	32	50
Zagreb	30	13	6	11	36	42	45
Cibalia	30	13	6	11	35	35	45
Lokomotiva	30	12	8	10	33	33	44
Osijek	30	11	10	9	45	38	43
Istra	30	11	9	10	35	33	42
Zadar	30	11	7	12	29	44	40
Inter	30	11	5	14	33	33	38
Rijeka (R)	30	9	11	10	29	29	38
Lucko (R)	30	6	13	11	29	36	31
Sibenik (R)	30	6	9	15	27	39	27
Karlovac[1] (R)	30	6	7	17	25	53	24
Varazdin[1] (R)[2]	30	2	3	25	16	52	8

[1]1pt deducted for failing to appear for a game
[2]Varazdin expelled from league for failing to pay players; last 7 matches awarded as 3-0 wins to opponents

CYPRUS

Division split after 26-round regular season (Anagennisi and Ermis were relegated automatically after finishing in the bottom 2); teams carried forward full regular season record

CYPRUS – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AEL (C)	32	20	8	4	37	10	68
APOEL	32	20	6	6	46	19	66
Omonia	32	20	6	6	56	23	66
Anorthosis	32	17	8	7	36	22	59

CYPRUS – PLACEMENT GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AEK	32	13	10	9	40	27	49
Apollon	32	12	7	13	36	43	43
Nea Salamina	32	11	10	11	39	47	43
Alki	32	12	6	14	35	45	42

CYPRUS – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ethnikos	32	10	10	12	31	30	40
Olympiakos	32	10	9	13	36	44	39
ENP	32	11	5	16	26	29	38
Aris (R)	32	8	8	16	32	44	32

CZECH REPUBLIC

Apr 27: Sparta 1 Olomouc 0.
Apr 28: Ceske Budejovice 0 Liberec 4; Ostrava 3 Zizkov 1; Slovacko 0 Teplice 0.
Apr 29: Jablonec 2 Hradec Kralove 0; Dukla 1 Mlada Boleslav 2; Bohemians 1905 2 Pribram 0.
Apr 30: Plzen 3 Slavia 0.
May 3: Slavia 5 Hradec Kralove 0.
May 4: Liberec 0 Slovacko 0.
May 5: Pribram 1 Ostrava 2.
May 6: Zizkov 2 Ceske Budejovice 0; Olomouc 1 Jablonec 1; Mlada Boleslav 0 Plzen 1; Teplice 4 Dukla 0; Sparta 1 Bohemians 1905 0.
May 9: Bohemians 1905 0 Teplice 0; Dukla 1 Sparta 1; Jablonec 0 Liberec 2; Ceske Budejovice 1 Mlada Boleslav 0; Ostrava 3 Slavia 0; Slovacko 2 Zizkov 1; Plzen 5 Pribram 0; Hradec Kralove 1 Olomouc 2.
May 12: Slavia 3 Bohemians 1905 1; Zizkov 1 Hradec Kralove 1; Liberec 0 Plzen 0; Pribram 0 Slovacko 4; Teplice 1 Ostrava 1; Mlada Boleslav 3 Jablonec 0; Olomouc 2 Dukla 1; Sparta 3 Ceske Budejovice 0.

CZECH REPUBLIC – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liberec (C)	30	20	6	4	68	29	66
Sparta	30	20	4	6	51	25	64
Plzen	30	19	6	5	66	33	63
M Boleslav	30	15	5	10	49	34	50
Teplice	30	12	10	8	36	30	46
Dukla	30	11	9	10	42	35	42
Slovacko	30	12	5	13	29	32	41
Jablonec	30	11	7	12	54	43	40
Pribram	30	11	6	13	44	56	39
C Budejovice	30	9	8	13	30	51	35
Olomouc[1]	30	11	10	9	42	38	34
Slavia	30	8	10	12	28	34	34
H Kralove	30	8	7	15	22	38	31
Ostrava	30	7	7	16	31	48	28
Bohemians (R)	30	6	6	18	20	54	24
Zizkov (R)	30	5	4	21	23	55	19

[1]9pts deducted for match-fixing

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Shield venue...Villa Park

ENGLAND

Shield venue moved

Manchester City and Chelsea will contest the Community Shield at Villa Park on August 12 because the men's Olympic Final is at Wembley the day before. Champions League winners Chelsea will face Europa League winners Atletico Madrid in the UEFA Super Cup at Monaco's Stade Louis II on August 31.

ESTONIA

Levadia win again

Having failed to win any sort of trophy the previous season for the first time in the club's history, Levadia bounced back this year to lift the Estonian Cup after defeating Trans Narva 3-0 in the Final. Podholjuzin Maksim, Artjom Artjunin and captain Igor Morozov were the scorers.

GREECE

No smoke

OFI keeper Polychronis Vezyridis was banned for two years after testing positive for cocaine – which he says must have been in a pipe that fans gave to him to smoke.

1,066 goals scored in the Premier League this season, which surpasses the previous best of 1,063 set last term

DENMARK

Apr 28: Nordsjaelland 5 AGF 3.
Apr 29: Lyngby 1 Midtjylland 2; SonderjyskE 3 Brondby 3; HB Koge 2 Horsens 1; Copenhagen 3 AaB 0.
Apr 30: Silkeborg 1 OB 1.
May 2: AGF 2 Lyngby 1; Nordsjaelland 1 Copenhagen 0.
May 3: Horsens 5 SonderjyskE 0; Midtjylland 2 HB Koge 1; OB 1 AaB 2; Brondby 3 Silkeborg 2.
May 5: Lyngby 0 Nordsjaelland 2.
May 6: HB Koge 1 AGF 3; Silkeborg 0 Horsens 1; AaB 1 Brondby 0; Copenhagen 1 OB 1.
May 7: SonderjyskE 1 Midtjylland 1.
May 12: Horsens 2 Midtjylland 1.
May 13: Lyngby 3 AaB 2; SonderjyskE 2 Copenhagen 2; HB Koge 1 Silkeborg 3; AGF 5 Brondby 1.
May 14: Nordsjaelland 0 OB 0.
May 20: Midtjylland 1 Copenhagen 0; Silkeborg 1 SonderjyskE 1; Horsens 3 AGF 1; Brondby 0 Nordsjaelland 1; AaB 1 HB Koge 0; OB 4 Lyngby 0.
May 23: Nordsjaelland 3 Horsens 0; Lyngby 1 Brondby 0; SonderjyskE 5 AaB 0; HB Koge 1 OB 1; Copenhagen 2 Silkeborg 1; AGF 0 Midtjylland 2.

DENMARK – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nordsj'land (C)	33	21	5	7	49	22	68
Copenhagen	33	19	9	5	55	26	66
Midtjylland	33	17	7	9	50	40	58
Horsens	33	17	6	10	53	39	57
AGF	33	12	12	9	47	40	48
SonderjyskE	33	11	11	11	48	51	44
AaB	33	12	8	13	42	48	44
Silkeborg	33	11	10	12	51	47	43
Brondby	33	9	9	15	35	46	36
OB	33	8	10	15	46	50	34
Lyngby (R)	33	8	4	21	32	60	28
HB Koge (R)	33	4	7	22	32	71	19

ENGLAND

Tuesday, April 24
Aston Villa 1 (Warnock 61)
Bolton 2 (Petrov pen 62, Ngog 63) Att: 32,263

Saturday, April 28
Everton 4 (Jelavic pen 7, 40, Fellaini 16, Cahill 60)
Fulham 0 Att: 31,885

Norwich 0
Liverpool 3 (Suarez 24, 28, 82) Att: 26,819

Stoke 1 (Crouch 9)
Arsenal 1 (Van Persie 15) Att: 27,502

Sunderland 2 (Bendtner 36, McClean 55)
Bolton 2 (K Davies 26, 70) Att: 40,768

Swansea 4 (Orlandi 1, Allen 4, Dyer 15, Graham 31)
Wolverhampton 4 (Fletcher 28, Jarvis 33, 69, Edwards 54) Att: 19,408

West Bromwich 0
Aston Villa 0 Att: 25,984

Wigan 4 (Moses 13, 15, Maloney 36, Di Santo 45+2)
Newcastle 0 Att: 22,187

Sunday, April 29
Chelsea 6 (Sturridge 1, Terry 13, Fernando Torres 19, 25, 64, Malouda 80)
Queens Park Rangers 1 (Cisse 84) Att: 41,675

Tottenham 2 (Van der Vaart 22, Walker 75)
Blackburn 0 Att: 35,798

Monday, April 30
Manchester City 1 (Kompany 45+1)
Manchester United 0 Att: 47,259

Tuesday, May 1
Liverpool 0
Fulham 1 (Skrtel og 5) Att: 40,106

Stoke 1 (Jerome 69)
Everton 1 (Crouch og 44) Att: 26,500

Wednesday, May 2
Bolton 1 (Reo-Coker 51)
Tottenham 4 (Modric 37, Van der Vaart 60, Adebayor 62, 69) Att: 22,349

Chelsea 0
Newcastle 2 (Cisse 19, 90+4) Att: 41,559

Saturday, May 5
Arsenal 3 (Benayoun 2, Van Persie 72, 80)
Norwich 3 (Hoolahan 12, Holt 27, Morison 85) Att: 60,092

Sunday, May 6
Aston Villa 1 (Clark 35)
Tottenham 1 (Adebayor pen 62) Att: 36,008

Bolton 2 (Petrov pen 24, Jones og 72)
West Bromwich 2 (Brunt 75, Morrison 90) Att: 25,662

Fulham 2 (Dempsey 12, Dembele 35)
Sunderland 1 (Bardsley 34) Att: 25,683

Manchester United 2 (Scholes 28, Young 41)
Swansea 0 Att: 75,496

Newcastle 0
Manchester City 2 (Y Toure 70, 89) Att: 52,389

Queens Park Rangers 1 (Cisse 89)
Stoke 0 Att: 17,319

Wolverhampton 0
Everton 0 Att: 25,466

Monday, May 7
Blackburn 0
Wigan 1 (Alcaraz 87) Att: 26,144

Tuesday, May 8
Liverpool 4 (Essien og 19, Henderson 25, Agger 28, Shelvey 61)
Chelsea 1 (Ramires 50) Att: 40,721

Sunday, May 13
Chelsea 2 (Terry 31, Raul Meireles 34)
Blackburn 1 (Yakubu 60) Att: 40,742

Everton 3 (Pienaar 16, Jelavic 27, Heitinga 65)
Newcastle 1 (Hibbert og 73) Att: 39,517

Manchester City 3 (Zabaleta 39, Dzeko 90+2, Aguero 90+4)
Queens Park Rangers 2 (Cisse 48, Mackie 66) Att: 48,000

Norwich 2 (Holt 8, Jackson 21)
Aston Villa 0 Att: 26,803

Stoke 2 (Walters 13, pen 77)
Bolton 2 (M Davies 39, K Davies 45) Att: 27,789

Sunderland 0
Manchester United 1 (Rooney 20) Att: 46,452

Swansea 1 (Graham 86)
Liverpool 0 Att: 20,605

Tottenham 2 (Adebayor 2, Defoe 63)
Fulham 0 Att: 36,256

West Bromwich 2 (Long 11, Dorrans 15)
Arsenal 3 (Benayoun 4, Andre Santos 30, Koscielny 54) Att: 26,358

Wigan 3 (Di Santo 12, Boyce 14, 79)
Wolverhampton 2 (Jarvis 9, Fletcher 86) Att: 21,986

ENGLAND – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man City (C)	38	28	5	5	93	29	89
Man United	38	28	5	5	89	33	89
Arsenal	38	21	7	10	74	49	70
Tottenham	38	20	9	9	66	41	69
Newcastle	38	19	8	11	56	51	65
Chelsea	38	18	10	10	65	46	64
Everton	38	15	11	12	50	40	56
Liverpool	38	14	10	14	47	40	52
Fulham	38	14	10	14	48	51	52
West Brom	38	13	8	17	45	52	47
Swansea	38	12	11	15	44	51	47
Norwich	38	12	11	15	52	66	47
Sunderland	38	11	12	15	45	46	45
Stoke	38	11	12	15	36	53	45
Wigan	38	11	10	17	42	62	43
Aston Villa	38	7	17	14	37	53	38
QPR	38	10	7	21	43	66	37
Bolton (R)	38	10	6	22	46	77	36
Blackburn (R)	38	8	7	23	48	78	31
Wolves (R)	38	5	10	23	40	82	25

Top scorers
30 Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)
27 Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)
23 Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)

FA CUP

Final
May 5 - London (Wembley)
Chelsea 2 (Ramires 11, Drogba 52)
Liverpool 1 (Carroll 64)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 89,102. **Ref:** Dowd

FRANCE

Friday, April 27
Lorient 2 (Mvuemba pen 41, Monnet-Paquet 53)
Marseille 1 (Valbuena 77) Att: 15,945

Toulouse 0
Montpellier 1 (Belhanda 3) Att: 21,251

Sunday, April 29
Auxerre 4 (Cisse 5, Kapo 17, Traore 28, Contout 39)
Brest 0 Att: 14,421

Lille 2 (Hazard pen 71, Roux 80)
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Pastore 48) Att: 17,262

Nancy 1 (Moukandjo 81)
Caen 1 (Niang 51) Att: 17,017

Rennes 3 (Feret 27, Boukari 85, Brahimi 90+1)
Ajaccio 1 (Ilan 89) Att: 17,498

Saint-Etienne 1 (Aubameyang 43)
Dijon 0 Att: 15,753

Sochaux 0
Bordeaux 3 (Jussie 12, Maurice-Belay pen 62, Saivet 70) Att: 19,352

Valenciennes 2 (Kadir 35, Digard og 54)
Nice 0 Att: 13,286

Tuesday, May 1
Montpellier 2 (Belhanda pen 42, Giroud 84)
Evian 2 (Kahlenberg 44, Berigaud 69) Att: 22,599

Wednesday, May 2
Ajaccio 2 (Kinkela pen 74, Socrier 85)
Sochaux 1 (Privat 58) Att: 8,171

Bordeaux 2 (Obraniak 51, N'Guemo 58)
Rennes 0 Att: 19,531

Brest 0
Toulouse 0 Att: 13,183

Caen 1 (Heurtaux 67)
Lorient 0 Att: 13,578

Lyon 4 (Lopez 35, 72, Cris 69, Briand 88)
Valenciennes 1 (Cohade pen 38) Att: 30,890

Marseille 1 (Remy 31)
Nancy 0 Att: 39,430

Nice 0
Lille 1 (De Melo 6) Att: 10,570

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Nene pen 21, Pastore 88)
Saint-Etienne 0 Att: 43,961

Thursday, May 3
Dijon 0
Auxerre 2 (Contout 30, Ndinga 86) Att: 14,764

Sunday, May 6
Evian 2 (Barbosa 15, Wass 54)
Ajaccio 1 (Andre 14) Att: 11,576

Lyon 1 (Gourcuff 37)
Brest 1 (Lorenzi 75) Att: 31,016

Valenciennes 3 (Aboubakar 8, Gomis 11, Cohade 80)
Paris Saint-Germain 4 (Nene 15, Maxwell 40, Matuidi 45, Menez 58) Att: 16,914

Monday, May 7
Auxerre 2 (Kapo 67, 80)
Bordeaux 4 (Gouffran 1, 5, Sane 9, Plasil 47) Att: 16,553

Lille 3 (De Melo pen 26, 36, Payet 60)
Caen 0 Att: 16,926

Lorient 0
Dijon 0 Att: 15,000

Rennes 0
Montpellier 2 (Camara 26, Costil og 52) Att: 28,172

Saint-Etienne 0
Marseille 0 Att: 22,422

Sochaux 1 (Roudet 86)
Nancy 0 Att: 18,223

Toulouse 0
Nice 0 Att: 31,805

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Drama...Igiebor scored an injury-time winner in the State Cup Final

ICELAND

More trophies for KR

Last season's double winners KR beat Fram 1-0 in the League Cup Final and FH 2-0 in the Super Cup.

ISRAEL

State Cup success

League runners-up Hapoel Tel Aviv became the first club to win the State Cup on three successive occasions as Nosa Igiebor struck in injury time to earn a dramatic 2-1 win against Maccabi Haifa in the Final.

Extra time loomed after Dela Yampolsky cancelled out Mirko Oremus' opening goal for the holders, but in the second minute of added time Nigerian midfielder Igiebor pounced to ensure a 15th cup win for Hapoel.

"I love Hapoel, I love Israel and I love the fans," said Igiebor.

Hapoel Tel Aviv now go into next season's Europa League, along with Maccabi Netanya and Bnei Yehuda Tel Aviv. League winners Hapoel Kiryat Shmona enter the Champions League in the second qualifying round.

Only Hapoel Ramat Gan were promoted as the Premier League is reduced to 14 teams next term.

Thursday, May 10

Evian 1 (Sagbo 15)
Lyon 3 (Kone 23, Briand 68, Lacazette pen 90+2)
Att: 14,973

Sunday, May 13

Ajaccio 1 (Eduardo pen 59)
Lyon 1 (Gomis 54) Att: 8,249

Bordeaux 1 (Gouffran pen 90+2)
Lorient 0 Att: 19,320

Brest 1 (Grougi 39)
Valenciennes 0 Att: 13,615

Caen 1 (Nivet 58)
Sochaux 3 (Privat 26, Poujol 39, Doubai 90+3)
Att: 17,191

Dijon 1 (Meite 27)
Toulouse 1 (Soukouna 44) Att: 14,016

Marseille 3 (Fanni 33, Azpilicueta 54, Gignac 90)
Auxerre 0 Att: 40,087

Montpellier 1 (Ait-Fana 90+4)
Lille 0 Att: 27,649

Nancy 3 (Moukandjo 6, 21, Mollo 44)
Saint-Etienne 2 (Aubameyang 39, Batlles 70)
Att: 17,408

Nice 1 (Pejcinovic 35)
Evian 1 (Pejcinovic og 13) Att: 10,544

Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Nene 47, 58, pen 65)
Rennes 0 Att: 45,347

Sunday, May 20

Auxerre 1 (Kapo 20)
Montpellier 2 (Utaka 32, 76) Att: 16,509

Evian 0
Brest 1 (Jemaa 50) Att: 11,222

Lille 4 (Hazard 10, 27, pen 34, De Melo 23)
Nancy 1 (Lemaitre 12) Att: 16,000

Lorient 1 (Monnet-Paquet 28)
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Pastore 61, Thiago Motta 75) Att: 16,000

Lyon 3 (Lopez 21, Briand 26, 69)
Nice 4 (Monzon 31, Coulibaly 37, Lloris og 53, Goncalves 73) Att: 26,000

Rennes 5 (Montano 9, Kembo pen 47, 57, Pitroipa 51, Hadji 84)
Dijon 0 Att: 17,601

Saint-Etienne 2 (Guilavogui 19, Aubameyang 49)
Bordeaux 3 (Diabate 23, 29, Gouffran 68)
Att: 22,726

Sochaux 1 (Boudebouz 55)
Marseille 0 Att: 18,636

Toulouse 0
Ajaccio 2 (Cavalli 20, 31) Att: 10,892

Valenciennes 3 (Aboubakar 37, Danic pen 68, Cohade 87)
Caen 1 (Nivet 77) Att: 18,024

FRANCE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Montpellier (C)	38	25	7	6	68	34	82
PSG	38	23	10	5	75	41	79
Lille	38	21	11	6	72	39	74
Lyon	38	19	7	12	64	51	64
Bordeaux	38	16	13	9	53	41	61
Rennes	38	17	9	12	53	44	60
Saint-Etienne	38	16	9	13	49	45	57
Toulouse	38	15	11	12	37	34	56
Evian	38	13	11	14	54	55	50
Marseille	38	12	12	14	45	41	48
Nancy	38	11	12	15	38	48	45
Valenciennes	38	12	7	19	40	50	43
Nice	38	10	12	16	39	46	42
Sochaux	38	11	9	18	40	60	42
Brest	38	8	17	13	31	38	41
Ajaccio	38	9	14	15	40	61	41
Lorient	38	9	12	17	35	49	39
Caen (R)	38	9	11	18	39	59	38
Dijon (R)	38	9	9	20	38	63	36
Auxerre (R)	38	7	13	18	46	57	34

Top scorers

21 Olivier Giroud (Montpellier)
21 Nene (Paris Saint-Germain)
20 Eden Hazard (Lille)

FRENCH CUP

Final

Apr 28 - Paris (Stade de France)
Lyon 1 (Lopez 28)
Quevilly 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 76,229. **Ref:** Piccirillo

GEORGIA

Division split into championship and relegation/promotion[1] groups after 22-round regular season

GEORGIA – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zestafoni (C)	28	16	7	5	52	28	55
Metalurgi	28	17	4	7	39	28	55
Torpedo	28	14	6	8	34	25	48
Dinamo	28	10	10	8	47	35	40
Dila	28	10	7	11	38	32	37
Kolkheti	28	8	8	12	25	39	32
Baia	28	5	7	16	25	49	22
Merani	28	6	3	19	31	55	21

[1]Spartaki Tskhinvali and Gagra were relegated after failing to finish in the top 4 of the 8-team rel/prom group

GERMANY

Saturday, April 28

Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Kiessling 75)
Hanover 0 Att: 30,210

Bayern Munich 2 (Gomez 32, Muller 90+2)
Stuttgart 0 Att: 69,000

Freiburg 4 (Mujdza 36, Guede 54, Caligiuri 84, Freis 90+1)
Cologne 1 (Podolski 47) Att: 24,000

Hamburg 0
Mainz 0 Att: 56,537

1899 Hoffenheim 2 (Beck 22, Braafheid 88)
Nuremberg 3 (Pekhart 9, 71, Didavi 45) Att: 30,150

Kaiserslautern 2 (Felipe Santana og 16, De Wit 49)
Borussia Dortmund 5 (Barrios 18, 26, 55, Gotze 33, Perisic 76) Att: 49,780

Monchengladbach 0
Augsburg 0 Att: 53,306

Schalke 4 (Huntelaar 32, 87, Holtby 73, Raul 84)
Hertha 0 Att: 61,673

Wolfsburg 3 (Salihamidzic 40, Helmes 66, 89)
Werder Bremen 1 (Rosenberg 45+1) Att: 30,000

Saturday, May 5

Augsburg 1 (Koo 34)
Hamburg 0 Att: 30,660

Borussia Dortmund 4 (Blaszczykowski 5, 39, Lewandowski 20, 27)
Freiburg 0 Att: 80,720

Cologne 1 (Novakovic 63)
Bayern Munich 4 (Muller 34, 85, Geromel og 52, Robben 54) Att: 50,000

Hanover 2 (Bugera og 38, Ya Konan 71)
Kaiserslautern 1 (De Wit 7) Att: 49,000

Hertha 3 (Ben-Hatira 14, 78, Raffael 90+2)
1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Compper 85) Att: 51,837

Mainz 0
Monchengladbach 3 (Reus 31, 62, De Camargo 69) Att: 34,000

Nuremberg 1 (Mak 58)
Bayer Leverkusen 4 (Kiessling 6, 32, 89, Schurrle 77) Att: 48,548

Stuttgart 3 (Cacau 73, Rodriguez 77, Traore 79)
Wolfsburg 2 (Helmes 28, Russ 60) Att: 58,500

Werder Bremen 2 (Pizarro pen 42, 82)
Schalke 3 (Draxler 30, Huntelaar 65, 74)
Att: 42,100

GERMANY – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dortmund (C)	34	25	6	3	80	25	81
Bayern	34	23	4	7	77	22	73
Schalke	34	20	4	10	74	44	64
M'gladbach	34	17	9	8	49	24	60
Leverkusen	34	15	9	10	52	44	54
Stuttgart	34	15	8	11	63	46	53
Hanover	34	12	12	10	41	45	48
Wolfsburg	34	13	5	16	47	60	44
Werder	34	11	9	14	49	58	42
Nuremberg	34	12	6	16	38	49	42
Hoffenheim	34	10	11	13	41	47	41
Freiburg	34	10	10	14	45	61	40
Mainz	34	9	12	13	47	51	39
Augsburg	34	8	14	12	36	49	38
Hamburg	34	8	12	14	35	57	36
Hertha (R)[1]	34	7	10	17	38	64	31
Cologne (R)	34	8	6	20	39	75	30
Kaisers'tern (R)	34	4	11	19	24	54	23

[1]Hertha relegated after losing rel/prom play-off

Top scorers

29 Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (Schalke)
26 Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)
22 Robert Lewandowski (Borussia Dortmund)

GERMAN CUP

Final

May 12 - Berlin (Olympiastadion)
Borussia Dortmund 5 (Kagawa 3, Hummels pen 41, Lewandowski 45+1, 58, 81)
Bayern Munich 2 (Robben pen 25, Ribery 75)
HT: 3-1. **Att:** 75,708. **Ref:** Gagelmann

GREECE

GREECE – FINAL[1]

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos (C)	30	23	4	3	70	17	73
Panathin'kos[2]	30	22	3	5	54	23	66
PAOK	30	14	8	8	45	27	50
Atromitos	30	13	11	6	32	26	50
AEK	30	13	9	8	36	30	48
Asteras	30	13	6	11	30	34	45
Levadiakos	30	11	6	13	33	42	39
Giannina	30	10	8	12	30	35	38
Aris[2]	30	10	10	10	29	33	37
OFI	30	10	7	13	27	32	37
Xanthi	30	10	6	14	31	35	36
Panionios	30	9	6	15	26	34	33
Kerkyra	30	8	8	14	31	44	32
Ergotelis (R)	30	7	8	15	27	44	29
Panetolikos (R)	30	7	7	16	23	37	28
Doxa (R)	30	4	5	21	11	42	17

[1]Teams placed 2nd to 5th entered play-off group to determine 2nd Champions League representatives (Panathinaikos won the group to take the CL place)
[2]3pts deducted for fan violence

HOLLAND

Apr 27: Groningen 1 De Graafschap 1.
Apr 28: Heracles 2 Heerenveen 4; Utrecht 1 NAC 3; Vitesse 3 Excelsior 2; VVV 2 Den Haag 1.
Apr 29: Roda JC 1 PSV 3; Twente 1 Ajax 2; Feyenoord 1 AZ 0; NEC 1 RKC 1.
May 2: Utrecht 2 Vitesse 2; Ajax 2 VVV 0; Groningen 1 NAC 1; De Graafschap 2 Excelsior 2; RKC 5 Roda JC 2; Twente 3 Heerenveen 4; NEC 1 AZ 1; PSV 5 Den Haag 0; Feyenoord 4 Heracles 1.
May 6: VVV 4 Twente 2; Roda JC 1 Utrecht 3; Excelsior 1 PSV 3; Heerenveen 2 Feyenoord 3; AZ 1 Groningen 0; Vitesse 1 Ajax 3; Heracles 1 NEC 2; Den Haag 3 De Graafschap 5; NAC 3 RKC 2.

HOLLAND – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax (C)	34	23	7	4	93	36	76
Feyenoord	34	21	7	6	70	37	70
PSV	34	21	6	7	87	47	69
AZ	34	19	8	7	64	35	65
Heerenveen	34	18	10	6	79	59	64
Twente	34	17	9	8	82	46	60
Vitesse	34	15	8	11	48	43	53
NEC	34	13	6	15	42	45	45
RKC	34	13	6	15	40	49	45
Roda JC	34	14	2	18	55	70	44
Utrecht	34	11	10	13	55	58	43
Heracles	34	11	7	16	52	62	40
NAC	34	10	8	16	45	54	38
Groningen	34	10	7	17	41	61	37
Den Haag	34	8	8	18	38	67	32
VVV[1]	34	9	4	21	42	78	31
De G'chap (R)[1]	34	6	6	22	36	74	24
Excelsior (R)	34	4	7	23	28	76	19

[1]VVV and De Graafschap entered rel/prom play-offs. De Graafschap lost their initial tie and so were relegated; VVV won both their ties to stay in the top division

DUTCH CUP

Final

Apr 8 - Rotterdam (De Kuip)
PSV 3 (Toivonen 31, Mertens 56, Lens 63)
Heracles 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 50,000. **Ref:** Van Boekel

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LATVIA

Skonto are spot on

Roman Amirkhanov scored the decisive spot-kick as 10-man Skonto beat Liepajas Metalurgs on penalties after they drew 1-1 in the Latvian Cup Final.

Valerijs Sabala had put Skonto ahead, but after Adil Ibragimov was dismissed Metalurgs made the most of their numerical advantage and levelled through Vladimirs Kamess.

LITHUANIA

Zalgiris stop holders

Zalgiris have ensured that league leaders Ekranas will not complete a third successive domestic double this season as they beat the holders on penalties in the Lithuanian Cup Final.

With the match goalless after 120 minutes, keeper Armantas Vitkauskas saved two spot-kicks to give Zalgiris their first trophy since 2003.

LUXEMBOURG

Dudelange do double

F91 Dudelange successfully defended their First Division title, winning the league for the 10th time in 13 years. They completed the double by beating Jeunesse Esch 4-2 in the Cup Final.

Victorious...Dudelange

MACEDONIA

Nine-year wait over

Vardar clinched their first league title for nine years with a 2-1 win at Sileks. Filip Ivanovski scored twice to take his tally for the season to 23.

"We worked extra hard all year and we utterly

HUNGARY

HUNGARY – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Debrecen (C)	30	22	8	0	64	18	74
Videoton	30	21	3	6	58	19	66
Gyor	30	20	3	7	56	31	63
Honved	30	13	7	10	48	40	46
Kecskemet	30	13	6	11	47	39	45
Paks	30	12	9	9	47	51	45
Diosgyor	30	13	4	13	42	43	43
Haladas	30	9	11	10	39	37	38
Siofok	30	9	9	12	30	41	36
Kaposvar	30	7	14	9	35	42	35
Ferencvaros	30	9	7	14	32	35	34
Pecs	30	8	10	12	36	50	34
Ujpest	30	8	8	14	34	46	32
Papa	30	8	6	16	26	40	30
Vasas[1] (R)	30	5	9	16	29	51	22
Zalaeg'zeg (R)	30	1	10	19	25	65	13

[1]2pts deducted for fielding ineligible player

ISRAEL

Division split after 30-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

ISRAEL – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kiryat Sh'a (C)	37	21	10	6	48	26	73
H Tel Aviv[1]	37	16	14	7	63	35	59
Bnei Yehuda	37	16	11	10	53	36	59
Netanya	37	17	8	12	54	48	59
M Haifa	37	16	10	11	56	44	58
M Tel Aviv	37	16	7	14	55	43	55
Ashdod	37	14	12	11	44	44	54
Bnei Sakhnin[2]	37	15	7	15	60	53	50

[1]3pts deducted because of fan violence
[2]2pts deducted for contract irregularities

ISRAEL – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Beitar[3]	37	15	7	15	32	44	50
Acre	37	13	9	15	51	45	48
R HaSharon	37	11	13	13	37	45	46
H Haifa	37	11	11	15	41	43	44
Be'er Sheva	37	12	7	18	41	61	43
M P Tikva[4] (R)	37	11	10	16	39	57	40
R LeZion (R)	37	6	9	22	39	70	27
H P Tikva[5] (R)	37	8	11	18	36	55	26

[3]2pts deducted for fans' racial abuse of opposition player
[4]3pts deducted for on-pitch brawl
[5]9pts deducted for going into administration

ITALY

Tuesday, April 24

Atalanta 1 (Moralez 72)
Chievo 0 Att: 15,045

Cagliari 3 (Thiago Ribeiro 21, Pinilla 80, Ibarbo 90+4)
Catania 0 Att: 7,494

Wednesday, April 25

Cesena 0
Juventus 1 (Borriello 79) Att: 23,343

Lecce 0
Napoli 2 (Hamsik 5, Cavani 51) Att: 18,113

Milan 1 (Boateng 86)
Genoa 0 Att: 48,295

Novara 2 (Diakite og 35, Mascara 79)
Lazio 1 (Candreva 37) Att: 17,157

Palermo 1 (Hernandez 6)
Parma 2 (Okaka 55, Biabiany 70) Att: 14,365

Roma 1 (Totti 71)
Fiorentina 2 (Jovetic 2, Lazzari 90+2) Att: 36,287

Siena 1 (Destro 52)
Bologna 1 (Brkic og 69) Att: 9,011

Udinese 1 (Danilo 6)
Internazionale 3 (Sneijder 10, 28, Alvarez 38) Att: 24,219

Saturday, April 28

Cagliari 0
Chievo 0 Att: 4,000

Palermo 1 (Miccoli 47)
Catania 1 (Legrottaglie 25) Att: 18,462

Roma 2 (Marquinho 41, Simplicio 88)
Napoli 2 (Zuniga 48, Cavani 67) Att: 29,643

Sunday, April 29

Atalanta 2 (Denis 11, Bonaventura 51)
Fiorentina 0 Att: 14,714

Bologna 3 (Portanova 24, Ramirez 37, Garics 67)
Genoa 2 (Palacio 59, Jorquera 77) Att: 23,510

Internazionale 2 (Von Bergen og 59, Zarate 72)
Cesena 1 (Ceccarelli 57) Att: 45,802

Lecce 1 (Tomovic 83)
Parma 2 (Giovinco 67, Paletta 78) Att: 10,293

Novara 0
Juventus 4 (Vucinic 16, 64, Borriello 40, Vidal 50) Att: 16,313

Siena 1 (Bogdani 83)
Milan 4 (Cassano 26, Ibrahimovic 29, 90+5, Nocerino 90) Att: 14,655

Udinese 2 (Di Natale 69, Pereyra 90+4)
Lazio 0 Att: 19,760

Tuesday, May 1

Chievo 0
Roma 0 Att: 8,000

Napoli 2 (Cavani pen 16, Hamsik 35)
Palermo 0 Att: 41,397

Wednesday, May 2

Catania 0
Bologna 1 (Ramirez 79) Att: 13,000

Cesena 0
Udinese 1 (Fabbrini 4) Att: 13,650

Fiorentina 2 (Montolivo pen 48, 71)
Novara 2 (Jeda 14, Rigoni pen 30) Att: 18,132

Genoa 2 (Palacio 12, Jankovic 76)
Cagliari 1 (Ariaudo 13)
Match played behind closed doors

Juventus 1 (Marchisio 8)
Lecce 1 (Bertolacci 84) Att: 38,573

Lazio 1 (Ledesma pen 62)
Siena 1 (Destro 26) Att: 26,194

Milan 2 (Muntari 9, Robinho 90+3)
Atalanta 0 Att: 38,204

Parma 3 (Marques 53, Giovinco 55, Biabiany 83)
Internazionale 1 (Sneijder 13) Att: 20,009

Saturday, May 5

Lecce 0
Fiorentina 1 (Cerci 35) Att: 12,693

Roma 2 (Totti 52, 77)
Catania 2 (Lodi pen 58, Marchese 67) Att: 32,585

Sunday, May 6

Atalanta 0
Lazio 2 (Kozak 35, Cana 90) Att: 16,293

Bologna 2 (Diamanti 17, Rubin 64)
Napoli 0 Att: 26,647

Cagliari 0
Juventus 2 (Vucinic 6, Canini og 74) Att: 20,000

Internazionale 4 (Milito 14, pen 52, pen 79, Maicon 87)
Milan 2 (Ibrahimovic pen 44, 46) Att: 78,222

Novara 3 (Rigoni pen 28, pen 68, 85)
Cesena 0 Att: 8,224

Palermo 4 (Miccoli pen 9, 19, 74, Silvestre 89)
Chievo 4 (Pellissier pen 28, 72, Uribe 30, Luciano 46) Att: 22,617

Siena 0
Parma 2 (Giovinco 67, Floccari 90+2) Att: 8,644

Udinese 2 (Di Natale 30, Floro Flores 66)
Genoa 0 Att: 19,741

Sunday, May 13

Catania 0
Udinese 2 (Di Natale 19, Fabbrini 58) Att: 16,359

Cesena 2 (Del Nero 9, Santana 89)
Roma 3 (Bojan 27, Lamela 32, De Rossi 49) Att: 14,883

Chievo 1 (Vacek 78)
Lecce 0 Att: 7,000

Fiorentina 0
Cagliari 0 Att: 17,787

Genoa 2 (Gilardino 52, Sculli 70)
Palermo 0
Match played behind closed doors

Juventus 3 (Marrone 10, Del Piero 28, Barzagli pen 90+1)
Atalanta 1 (Lichtsteiner og 83) Att: 40,944

Lazio 3 (Kozak 59, Candreva 63, Mauri 90+1)
Internazionale 1 (Milito pen 45) Att: 45,051

Milan 2 (Flamini 56, Inzaghi 82)
Novara 1 (García 20) Att: 45,211

Napoli 2 (Dossena 4, 34)
Siena 1 (Destro 6) Att: 43,582

Parma 1 (Biabiany 37)
Bologna 0 Att: 23,950

ITALY – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus (C)	38	23	15	0	68	20	84
Milan	38	24	8	6	74	33	80
Udinese	38	18	10	10	52	35	64
Lazio	38	18	8	12	56	47	62
Napoli	38	16	13	9	66	46	61
Inter	38	17	7	14	58	55	58
Roma	38	16	8	14	60	54	56
Parma	38	15	11	12	54	53	56
Bologna	38	13	12	13	41	43	51
Chievo	38	12	13	13	35	45	49
Catania	38	11	15	12	47	52	48
Atalanta[1]	38	13	13	12	41	43	46
Fiorentina	38	11	13	14	37	43	46
Siena	38	11	11	16	45	45	44
Cagliari	38	10	13	15	37	46	43
Palermo	38	11	10	17	52	62	43
Genoa	38	11	9	18	50	69	42
Lecce (R)	38	8	12	18	40	56	36
Novara (R)	38	7	11	20	35	65	32
Cesena (R)	38	4	10	24	24	60	22

[1]6pts deducted because of involvement in match-fixing scandal

Top scorers

28 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)
24 Diego Milito (Internazionale)
23 Edinson Cavani (Napoli)
23 Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)

ITALIAN CUP

Final

May 20 - Rome (Olimpico)
Juventus 0
Napoli 2 (Cavani pen 63, Hamsik 83)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Brighi
Sent off: Quagliarella (Juventus) 89min

LUXEMBOURG

LUXEMBOURG – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dudelange (C)	26	16	6	4	67	20	54
Jeunesse	26	15	6	5	56	37	51
Grevenmacher	26	14	7	5	50	27	49
Differdange	26	13	9	4	64	26	48
Kaerjeng	26	12	7	7	37	35	43
Fola	26	10	8	8	41	30	38
Hamm Benfica	26	12	2	12	54	47	38
Petange	26	10	6	10	29	37	36
Progres	26	9	6	11	32	35	33
Racing	26	7	11	8	40	41	32
Union 05	26	8	5	13	39	51	29
Swift (R)[1]	26	7	5	14	34	53	26
Rumelange (R)	26	5	4	17	27	71	19
Hostert (R)	26	2	2	22	22	82	8

[1]Swift relegated after losing rel/prom play-off

MACEDONIA

MACEDONIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vardar (C)	33	22	10	1	50	15	76
Metalurg	33	19	10	4	53	16	67
Shkendija	33	20	6	7	53	28	66
Renova	33	13	13	7	56	38	52
Bregalnica	33	13	6	14	51	47	45
Sileks	33	13	3	17	42	51	42
Napredok	33	12	6	15	37	51	42
Rabotnicki	33	11	8	14	50	45	41
Turnovo[1]	33	10	8	15	34	42	38
Teteks[1]	33	8	11	14	23	48	35
Ohrid (R)	33	6	8	19	26	62	26
11 Okt'vri (R)	33	3	7	23	26	58	16

[1]Turnovo and Teteks entered rel/prom play-offs

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Tragic...Gromstad died aged 22

deserve the title," said goalscorer Ivanovski.

Renova beat Rabotnicki 3-1 in the Final to win the Macedonian Cup for the first time in their history.

NORWAY

Defender found dead

Tor Marius Gromstad, a defender with top-flight side Stabaek, was found dead on a building site in Oslo.

ROMANIA

Andone does it again

CFR Cluj sealed their third championship with a match to spare after coming from two goals down to win 3-2 at local rivals Universitatea.

Ioan Andone, who only returned to the club in April to replace Portuguese boss Jorge Costa, was CFR's coach when they won their first league title in 2008.

Happy comeback...Andone

SLOVAKIA

New coach wins title

Having replaced coach Lubos Nosicky with Frans Adelaar with two months of the season to go, Zilina won 2-0 at Dunajska Streda on the last day of the season to secure a sixth league title.

They also won their first-ever Slovak Cup, beating Senica 3-2 after extra time in the Final.

MALTA

Division split after 22-round regular season; teams carried forward half their points (rounded up) and full games and goals record from regular season

MALTA – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Valletta (C)	32	25	5	2	75	24	53
Hibernians	32	22	6	4	74	26	47
Birkirkara	32	17	4	11	55	37	38
Floriana	32	16	6	10	47	35	33
Sliema	32	9	14	9	47	47	24
Balzan	32	9	6	17	36	67	18

MALTA – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Qormi	32	15	2	15	54	48	33
Mosta	32	10	8	14	45	47	27
Tarxien	32	11	3	18	45	54	27
Hamrun	32	9	7	16	47	71	25
Mqabba (R)	32	9	7	16	40	55	24
Marsaxlokk (R)	32	5	2	25	34	88	8

MOLDOVA

MOLDOVA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sheriff (C)	33	25	6	2	75	18	81
Dacia	33	24	5	4	63	17	77
Zimbru	33	17	10	6	47	24	61
Milsami	33	14	5	14	41	37	47
Olimpia	33	10	15	8	26	27	45
Tiraspol	33	10	12	11	36	32	42
Iskra-Stal	33	11	7	15	41	48	40
Nistru	33	10	9	14	30	41	39
Academia	33	6	13	14	32	48	31
S Gheorghe	33	7	9	17	23	55	30
CSCA-Rapid (R)	33	6	8	19	20	52	26
Costuleni (R)	33	3	11	19	19	54	20

MONTENEGRO

MONTENEGRO – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Buducnost (C)	33	25	5	3	82	25	80
Rudar	33	23	8	2	60	20	77
Zeta	33	17	9	7	55	40	60
Mogren	33	15	9	9	54	37	54
Petrovac	33	13	9	11	36	39	48
Lovcen	33	10	10	13	32	42	40
Mladost	33	10	7	16	32	45	37
Sutjeska	33	9	9	15	29	36	36
Decic	33	10	4	19	34	51	34
Grbalj [2]	33	9	7	17	28	49	34
Berane[1,2]	33	8	5	20	32	54	28
Bokelj (R)	33	5	6	22	21	57	21

[1] *1pt deducted*
[2] *Grbalj and Berane entered rel/prom play-offs*

NORTHERN IRELAND

Division split after 33-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

N IRELAND – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Linfield (C)	38	27	4	7	79	29	85
Portadown	38	22	5	11	72	47	71
Cliftonville	38	21	6	11	83	62	69
Coleraine	38	18	12	8	61	38	66
Crusaders	38	18	10	10	63	47	64
Glentoran	38	16	9	13	67	52	57

N IRELAND – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ballymena	38	14	8	16	66	71	50
Donegal Celtic	38	12	5	21	44	80	41
Dungannon	38	8	11	19	42	71	35
Glenavon	38	8	10	20	60	71	34
Lisburn[1]	38	8	8	22	56	84	32
Carrick (R)	38	7	10	21	50	91	31

[1] *Lisburn stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off*

NORWAY

Apr 27: Aalesund 2 Rosenborg 2.
Apr 28: Lillestrom 0 Stromsgodset 1; Fredrikstad 3 Sandnes Ulf 4; Viking 0 Haugesund 2; Stabaek 0 Odd Grenland 2; Tromso 0 Honefoss 0; Sogndal 2 Molde 1.
Apr 29: Brann 1 Valerenga 2.
May 4: Rosenborg 3 Stabaek 1.
May 5: Odd Grenland 2 Tromso 2.
May 6: Haugesund 1 Lillestrom 1; Valerenga 3 Fredrikstad 2; Sandnes Ulf 1 Honefoss 0; Stromsgodset 3 Sogndal 0; Molde 2 Aalesund 1.
May 7: Brann 0 Viking 0.
May 12: Stabaek 0 Molde 5; Tromso 3 Valerenga 1.
May 13: Fredrikstad 0 Haugesund 0; Sandnes Ulf 1 Rosenborg 1; Aalesund 3 Stromsgodset 1; Honefoss 1 Odd Grenland 4; Sogndal 1 Viking 2; Lillestrom 3 Brann 4.
May 16: Stromsgodset 2 Tromso 0; Rosenborg 0 Honefoss 1; Haugesund 4 Aalesund 2; Viking 1 Lillestrom 2; Molde 2 Fredrikstad 0; Brann 5 Sogndal 0; Odd Grenland 2 Sandnes Ulf 2.
May 19: Fredrikstad 2 Stromsgodset 3; Honefoss 1 Valerenga 0.
May 20: Tromso 5 Viking 1; Sandnes Ulf 0 Molde 2; Lillestrom 1 Sogndal 0; Aalesund 2 Brann 0; Stabaek 0 Haugesund 2; Rosenborg 0 Odd Grenland 0.
May 23: Stromsgodset 1 Odd Grenland 0; Brann 2 Fredrikstad 0; Viking 1 Stabaek 0; Sogndal 0 Sandnes Ulf 0; Valerenga 0 Rosenborg 0.
May 24: Lillestrom 0 Aalesund 0; Haugesund 1 Honefoss 1; Molde 3 Tromso 2.
May 28: Sandnes Ulf 0 Haugesund 2; Stabaek 4 Lillestrom 1; Honefoss 1 Molde 1; Tromso 2 Brann 0.

NORWAY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Molde	12	8	1	3	23	13	25
Stromsgodset	11	8	1	2	21	13	25
Haugesund	12	6	5	1	21	11	23
Tromso	12	6	3	3	21	13	21
Rosenborg	11	4	6	1	16	9	18
Honefoss	12	4	6	2	11	9	18
Aalesund	11	3	5	3	14	14	14
Valerenga	10	4	2	4	12	14	14
Sandnes Ulf	12	3	5	4	15	20	14
Viking	11	4	2	5	9	14	14
Brann	12	4	1	7	19	19	13
Odd Grenland	11	3	4	4	14	14	13
Sogndal	11	3	4	4	10	13	13
Lillestrom	12	2	5	5	13	19	11
Fredrikstad	11	1	3	7	15	20	6
Stabaek	11	1	1	9	7	26	4

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

POLAND

Apr 27: Gornik 3 Podbeskidzie 0; Lech 1 Polonia 0.
Apr 28: Widzew 0 Lechia 1; GKS 0 Korona 2; Ruch 2 LKS 2.
Apr 29: Slask 2 Zaglebie 1; Legia 1 Jagiellonia 1.
Apr 30: Wisla 1 Cracovia 0.
May 3: Lech 1 Podbeskidzie 0; LKS 1 GKS 1; Korona 0 Widzew 2; Slask 3 Jagiellonia 1; Gornik 2 Wisla 0; Lechia 1 Legia 0; Polonia 0 Zaglebie 4; Cracovia 0 Ruch 2.
May 6: Zaglebie 2 Gornik 1; Jagiellonia 2 LKS 1; Widzew 0 Lech 0; Ruch 2 Lechia 1; GKS 2 Cracovia 2; Podbeskidzie 1 Polonia 1; Wisla 0 Slask 1; Legia 1 Korona 0.

POLAND – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slask (C)	30	17	5	8	47	31	56
Ruch	30	16	7	7	44	28	55
Legia	30	15	8	7	42	17	53
Lech	30	15	7	8	42	22	52
Korona	30	13	9	8	34	29	48
Polonia	30	13	6	11	33	32	45
Wisla	30	12	7	11	29	26	43
Gornik	30	11	9	10	36	30	42
Zaglebie	30	11	7	12	36	42	40
Jagiellonia	30	11	6	13	35	45	39
Widzew	30	9	12	9	25	26	39
Podbeskidzie	30	9	8	13	26	39	35
Lechia	30	7	10	13	21	30	31
GKS	30	7	10	13	34	36	31
LKS (R)	30	5	9	16	23	53	24
Cracovia (R)	30	4	10	16	20	41	22

PORTUGAL

Apr 27: Braga 1 Olhanense 2.
Apr 28: Gil Vicente 3 Guimaraes 1; Maritimo 0 Porto 2.
Apr 29: Uniao Leiria 0 Feirense 4; Beira Mar 2 Pacos Ferreira 0; Setubal 0 Nacional 3; Rio Ave 2 Benfica 2.
Apr 30: Sporting 2 Academica 1.
May 5: Porto 2 Sporting 0; Benfica 1 Uniao Leiria 0; Olhanense 0 Maritimo 0; Academica 1 Setubal 0; Braga 1 Beira Mar 0; Pacos Ferreira 2 Rio Ave 2; Feirense 1 Guimaraes 3; Nacional 3 Gil Vicente 1.
May 12: Gil Vicente 3 Feirense 1; Uniao Leiria 2 Nacional 3; Setubal 1 Benfica 3; Rio Ave 2 Porto 5; Maritimo 1 Pacos Ferreira 1; Beira Mar 1 Olhanense 2; Guimaraes 1 Academica 2; Sporting 3 Braga 2.

PORTUGAL – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto (C)	30	23	6	1	69	19	75
Benfica	30	21	6	3	66	27	69
Braga	30	19	5	6	59	29	62
Sporting	30	18	5	7	47	26	59
Maritimo	30	14	8	8	41	38	50
Guimaraes	30	14	3	13	40	40	45
Nacional	30	13	5	12	48	50	44
Olhanense	30	9	12	9	36	38	39
Gil Vicente	30	8	10	12	31	42	34
P Ferreira	30	8	7	15	35	53	31
Setubal	30	8	6	16	24	49	30
Beira Mar	30	8	5	17	26	38	29
Academica	30	7	8	15	27	38	29
Rio Ave	30	7	7	16	33	42	28
Feirense (R)	30	5	9	16	27	49	24
Uniao Leiria (R)	30	5	4	21	25	56	19

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Apr 27: Sligo 1 St Patrick's 1; UCD 1 Drogheda 1; Dundalk 0 Bohemians 2; Shelbourne 1 Cork 2; Shamrock 1 Derry 1; Monaghan 0 Bray 1.
May 4: Derry 0 St Patrick's 2; Cork 3 Dundalk 2; Bray 2 Bohemians 1; Drogheda 1 Sligo 3; Shamrock 2 UCD 2; Shelbourne 2 Monaghan 1.
May 11: Bohemians 1 Drogheda 1; Dundalk 0 Bray 2; St Patrick's 0 Cork 0; UCD 0 Shelbourne 2.
May 12: Sligo 3 Shamrock 0.
May 15: Monaghan 1 Derry 4.
May 18: Shamrock 3 Drogheda 1; Bohemians 1 Derry 2; Bray 3 St Patrick's 3; Cork 4 UCD 2; Sligo 3 Shelbourne 0; Dundalk 1 Monaghan 2.
May 21: Derry 3 Bray 2; Drogheda 1 Cork 1; St Patrick's 1 Dundalk 2; UCD 1 Sligo 0; Monaghan 0 Shamrock 0; Shelbourne 1 Bohemians 2.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sligo	13	9	3	1	22	7	30
Shamrock	13	6	5	2	27	17	23
St Patrick's	13	5	7	1	19	9	22
Derry	13	6	3	4	19	13	21
Drogheda	13	5	5	3	19	16	20
Shelbourne	13	5	3	5	14	18	18
Cork	13	4	4	5	20	16	16
Bray	13	4	3	6	20	25	15
Bohemians	13	4	2	7	11	15	14
UCD	13	3	3	7	15	22	12
Dundalk	13	3	3	7	9	23	12
Monaghan	13	2	3	8	10	24	9

33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

ROMANIA

Apr 27: Concordia 2 Vointa 0; Brasov 2 Dinamo 0.
Apr 28: Sportul 1 Gaz Metan 2; Universitatea 0 Pandurii 1; Vaslui 2 Astra 1; Ceahlaul 0 CFR 2.
Apr 29: Otelul 0 Tirgu-Mures 0; Rapid 1 Steaua 1.
Apr 30: Petrolul 3 Mioveni 1.
May 1: Vointa 1 Ceahlaul 2; Pandurii 1 Sportul 1; CFR 1 Brasov 0.
May 2: Tirgu-Mures 2 Vaslui 3; Astra 0 Rapid 1; Dinamo 2 Universitatea 2.
May 3: Mioveni 1 Concordia 3; Steaua 2 Petrolul 1; Gaz Metan 1 Otelul 0.
May 4: Brasov 3 Vointa 0.
May 5: Universitatea 1 Sportul 1; Dinamo 0 CFR 1.
May 6: Ceahlaul 2 Mioveni 0; Otelul 2 Pandurii 1; Petrolul 3 Astra 1; Rapid 1 Tirgu-Mures 1.
May 7: Concordia 0 Steaua 2; Vaslui 4 Gaz Metan 0.
May 8: Vointa 0 Dinamo 1.
May 9: Mioveni 0 Brasov 1; Sportul 0 Otelul 2.
May 10: Astra 0 Concordia 2; Tirgu-Mures 1 Petrolul 2; Pandurii 1 Vaslui 2; Gaz Metan 2 Rapid 2; Steaua 1 Ceahlaul 0.
May 11: CFR 2 Vointa 1.
May 12: Otelul 2 Universitatea 0; Dinamo 4 Mioveni 1.
May 13: Petrolul 4 G Metan 0; Concordia 4 T-Mures 1; Rapid 2 Pand'i 2; Vaslui 1 Sportul 0; Brasov 1 Steaua 2.
May 14: Ceahlaul 1 Astra 2.
May 15: Universitatea 3 Vointa 1; Mioveni 0 CFR 5.
May 16: Gaz Metan 1 Concordia 0; Sportul 0 Rapid 2; Otelul 1 Vaslui 2.
May 17: Tirgu-Mures 4 Ceahlaul 3; Pandurii 1 Petrolul 0; Astra 1 Brasov 4; Steaua 3 Dinamo 2.
May 18: Vointa 3 Mioveni 1; Universitatea 2 CFR 3.
May 19: Concordia 3 Pandurii 1.
May 20: Dinamo 3 Astra 0; Rapid 1 Otelul 0; CFR 1 Steaua 1; Vaslui 1 Universitatea 0.
May 21: Petrolul 0 Sportul 3; Brasov 2 Tirgu-Mures 1; Ceahlaul 2 Gaz Metan 0.

ROMANIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CFR (C)	34	21	8	5	63	31	71
Vaslui	34	22	4	8	58	29	70
Steaua	34	19	9	6	47	26	66
Rapid	34	18	10	6	54	29	64
Dinamo	34	18	8	8	57	32	62
Otelul	34	15	7	12	34	29	52
Pandurii	34	12	11	11	47	40	47
Universitatea	34	11	14	9	46	37	47
Concordia	34	13	6	15	42	52	45
Brasov	34	13	6	15	39	34	45
Ceahlaul	34	11	9	14	36	46	42
Astra	34	11	8	15	36	43	41
Gaz Metan	34	11	8	15	39	54	41
Petrolul	34	10	9	15	42	45	39
T'gu-Mures (R)	34	8	11	15	34	47	35
Vointa (R)	34	8	8	18	24	45	32
Sportul (R)	34	6	12	16	33	55	30
Mioveni (R)	34	2	6	26	20	77	12

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SPAIN

New season kick off

The new La Liga season will begin on the weekend of August 18/19, with the Real Madrid v Barcelona Super Cup being played on August 23 and 30.

The final round of league fixtures are set for May 19, 2013, with the Spanish Cup Final tentatively planned for May 8.

Early clash...Real and Barca

ARGENTINA

Top flight shake-up

The Primera Division will no longer crown two winners per season as the apertura and clausura competitions will be abolished in August.

As of the 2012-13 season, the top flight will play a single 38-game campaign. The season will be split into Inicial and Final stages – although neither will be a stand-alone championship – with the two winners meeting in a Final play-off. Relegation will still be determined by the average points system.

Banfield left-back Lautaro Bugatto, who was on loan to lower-league side Tristan Suarez this season, was shot dead outside his own home in Buenos Aires by a police officer who was trying to prevent a robbery.

BOLIVIA

Remarkable finish

Apertura champions The Strongest won the clausura when Luis Melgar scored a late winner away to San Jose to clinch the title from their hosts and Oriente Petrolero on goal difference.

Oriente had the title in their hands as they led 2-1 at Nacional Potosi, only to concede an equaliser in the

RUSSIA

Division split after 30-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

Championship group

Apr 28: Anzhi 3 Lokomotiv 1; Rubin 1 Kuban 1; CSKA 2 Spartak Moscow 1; Zenit 2 Dynamo 1.
May 2: Rubin 2 Zenit 2; Spartak Moscow 1 Dynamo 1; Kuban 2 Anzhi 2; Lokomotiv 0 CSKA 3.
May 6: Dynamo 2 Lokomotiv 2; Zenit 2 Spartak Moscow 3; Anzhi 3 Rubin 1.
May 8: CSKA 0 Kuban 0.
May 13: Rubin 3 CSKA 1; Kuban 1 Dynamo 1; Lokomotiv 0 Spartak Moscow 2; Anzhi 0 Zenit 2.

RUSSIA – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit (C)	44	24	16	4	85	40	88
Spartak M	44	21	12	11	68	48	75
CSKA	44	19	16	9	72	47	73
Dynamo	44	20	12	12	66	50	72
Anzhi	44	19	13	12	54	42	70
Rubin	44	17	17	10	55	41	68
Lokomotiv	44	18	12	14	59	48	66
Kuban	44	15	16	13	50	45	61

Relegation group

Apr 27: Tom 0 Amkar 0; Spartak Nalchik 0 Krylia Sovetov 0; Rostov 1 Terek 1; Krasnodar 2 Volga 1.
May 2: Spartak Nalchik 2 Rostov 2; Amkar 2 Krasnodar 2; Volga 1 Terek 3.
May 3: Krylia Sovetov 1 Tom 0.
May 6: Rostov 1 Volga 0; Terek 3 Amkar 1;
May 7: Tom 1 Spartak Nalchik 1; Krasnodar 0 Krylia Sovetov 2.
May 13: Tom 2 Rostov 1; Krylia Sovetov 1 Terek 1; Spartak Nalchik 3 Krasnodar 3; Amkar 4 Volga 1.

RUSSIA – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Krasnodar	44	16	13	15	58	61	61
Amkar	44	14	13	17	40	51	55
Terek	44	14	10	20	45	62	52
Krylia Sovetov	44	12	15	17	33	50	51
Rostov[1]	44	12	12	20	45	61	48
Volga[1]	44	12	5	27	37	60	41
Tom (R)	44	8	13	23	30	70	37
Spartak N (R)	44	7	13	24	39	60	34

[1]Rostov and Volga stay in the top division after both won their rel/prom play-off

RUSSIAN CUP

Final

May 9 - Yekaterinburg (Tsentralnyi)
Dynamo 0
Rubin 1 (Eremenko 78)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 27,000. **Ref:** Vilkov

SCOTLAND

Division split after 33-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

Championship group

Apr 28: Dundee United 2 Hearts 2; Motherwell 5 St Johnstone 1.
Apr 29: Celtic 3 Rangers 0.
May 1: Hearts 0 Motherwell 1.
May 2: Rangers 5 Dundee United 0.
May 3: Celtic 1 St Johnstone 0.
May 5: Rangers 0 Motherwell 0.
May 6: Dundee United 1 Celtic 0; Hearts 2 St Johnstone 0.
May 13: Motherwell 0 Dundee United 2; Celtic 5 Hearts 0; St Johnstone 0 Rangers 4.

SCOTLAND – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic (C)	38	30	3	5	84	21	93
Rangers[1]	38	26	5	7	77	28	73
Motherwell	38	18	8	12	49	44	62
Dundee Utd	38	16	11	11	62	50	59
Hearts	38	15	7	16	45	43	52
St Johnstone	38	14	8	16	43	50	50

[1]10pts deducted for going into administration

Relegation group

Apr 28: Kilmarnock 4 Inverness 3; Dunfermline 3 Aberdeen 0.
Apr 29: St Mirren 1 Hibernian 0.
May 2: Inverness 0 Dunfermline 0; Aberdeen 1 Hibernian 2; Kilmarnock 0 St Mirren 2.
May 5: St Mirren 0 Inverness 1; Kilmarnock 1 Aberdeen 1.
May 7: Hibernian 4 Dunfermline 0.
May 12: Aberdeen 0 St Mirren 0; Dunfermline 1 Kilmarnock 2; Inverness 2 Hibernian 0.

SCOTLAND – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kilmarnock	38	11	14	13	44	61	47
St Mirren	38	9	16	13	39	51	43
Aberdeen	38	9	14	15	36	44	41
Inverness	38	10	9	19	42	60	39
Hibernian	38	8	9	21	40	67	33
Dunf'mline (R)	38	5	10	23	40	82	25

SCOTTISH CUP

Final

May 19 - Glasgow (Hampden Park)
Hibernian 1 (McPake 41)
Hearts 5 (Barr 15, Skacel 27, 75, Grainger pen 48, McGowan 50)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 51,041. **Ref:** Thomson
Sent off: Kujabi (Hibernian) 47min

SERBIA

SERBIA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizan (C)	30	26	2	2	67	12	80
Red Star	30	21	5	4	57	18	68
Vojvodina	30	14	10	6	44	26	52
Jagodina	30	14	9	7	34	20	51
S Sevojno	30	15	6	9	42	35	51
Radnicki	30	11	14	5	38	27	47
Spartak	30	11	10	9	31	31	43
OFK	30	12	4	14	34	36	40
Javor	30	11	6	13	28	32	39
Rad	30	10	7	13	33	31	37
Hajduk	30	9	6	15	28	44	33
BSK	30	7	9	14	18	39	30
Smederevo	30	9	2	19	22	42	29
Novi Pazar	30	6	10	14	21	41	28
Borac (R)	30	4	7	19	16	45	19
Metalac (R)	30	2	9	19	14	48	15

SLOVAKIA

SLOVAKIA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zilina (C)	33	19	10	4	52	27	67
Spartak	33	19	8	6	44	22	65
Slovan	33	16	11	6	48	35	59
Senica	33	15	12	6	47	23	57
Trencin	33	12	12	9	51	49	48
Ruzomberok	33	11	11	11	39	34	44
Zlate Moravce	33	11	8	14	34	43	41
Nitra	33	9	12	12	33	39	39
Dukla	33	9	10	14	37	44	37
Tatran	33	7	12	14	23	35	33
Kosice	33	6	11	16	25	40	29
DAC (R)	33	5	1	27	21	63	16

SLOVENIA

SLOVENIA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maribor (C)	36	26	7	3	88	35	85
Olimpija	36	19	8	9	60	38	65
Mura	36	18	5	13	52	46	59
Koper	36	16	10	10	48	35	58
Gorica	36	14	11	11	49	37	53
Rudar	36	11	10	15	55	54	43
Domzale	36	11	7	18	39	52	40
Celje	36	9	10	17	44	56	37
Triglav[1]	36	9	6	21	22	67	33
Nafta (R)	36	5	10	21	34	71	25

[1]Triglav entered rel/prom play-off

SPAIN

Saturday, April 28

Espanyol 0
Sporting Gijon 3 (Colunga 48, Trejo 70, Bilic 80) Att: 22,000

Getafe 1 (Alexis 90+2)
Mallorca 3 (Victor 30, Alfaro 68, Hemed 78) Att: 11,000

Levante 3 (Kone 46, Xavi Torres 73, Valdo 83)
Granada 1 (Ighalo 67) Att: 25,000

Real Sociedad 3 (Griezmann 47, 70, Agirretxe 83)
Racing Santander 0 Att: 22,000

Villarreal 1 (Bruno 44)
Osasuna 1 (Raul Garcia 72) Att: 18,000

Sunday, April 29

Betis 2 (Pozuelo 85, Jonathan 87)
Atletico Madrid 2 (Koke 62, Falcao 90+4) Att: 38,000

Malaga 1 (Camacho 27)
Valencia 0 Att: 28,000

Rayo Vallecano 0
Barcelona 7 (Messi 15, 90, Rober og 26, Keita 38, Pedro 47, 87, Thiago 76) Att: 15,500

Real Madrid 3 (Cristiano Ronaldo 19, Benzema 48, 52)
Sevilla 0 Att: 72,000

Zaragoza 2 (Edu Oriol 28, Apono 51)
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 30,000

Tuesday, May 1

Getafe 1 (Fedor pen 59)
Racing Santander 1 (Diop 64) Att: 10,000

Granada 2 (Ighalo 29, 35)
Espanyol 1 (Didac 54) Att: 22,500

Sporting Gijon 2 (Lora 39, Galvez 85)
Villarreal 3 (Mario 19, Senna pen 43, Perez 56) Att: 29,000

Wednesday, May 2

Athletic Bilbao 0
Real Madrid 3 (Higuain 16, Ozil 20, Cristiano Ronaldo 50) Att: 39,500

Atletico Madrid 1 (Gabi 54)
Real Sociedad 1 (Vela 90+1) Att: 40,000

Barcelona 4 (Puyol 13, Messi pen 35, pen 59, 64)
Malaga 1 (Rondon 26) Att: 88,000

Mallorca 1 (Castro 62)
Rayo Vallecano 0 Att: 8,825

Sevilla 1 (Negredo 5)
Betis 2 (Benat 43, 90+2) Att: 45,000

Valencia 4 (Aduriz 77, 87, Jonas 83, 88)
Osasuna 0 Att: 35,000

Zaragoza 1 (Edu Oriol 11)
Levante 0 Att: 30,000

Saturday, May 5

Athletic Bilbao 0
Getafe 0 Att: 34,000

Atletico Madrid 2 (Koke 69, Adrian 79)
Malaga 1 (Eliseu 38) Att: 25,000

Barcelona 4 (Messi 12, pen 63, 74, pen 79)
Espanyol 0 Att: 89,044

Granada 1 (Jara 5)
Real Madrid 2 (Cristiano Ronaldo pen 80, Cortes og 90+2) Att: 22,000

Mallorca 1 (Pina 54)
Levante 0 Att: 15,000

Osasuna 1 (Balde 13)
Real Sociedad 0 Att: 17,394

Sevilla 5 (Diawara 30, 47, Cala 43, Reyes 65, Kanoute 81)
Rayo Vallecano 2 (Diego Costa pen 37, 77) Att: 28,000

Sporting Gijon 2 (Sangoy pen 12, 55)
Betis 1 (Jorge Molina 45) Att: 15,156

Valencia 1 (Jonas 90+2)
Villarreal 0 Att: 35,000

Zaragoza 2 (Helder Postiga 13, Lafita 79)
Racing Santander 1 (Christian 11) Att: 28,000

Saturday, May 12

Betis 2 (Ruben Castro 71, 74)
Barcelona 2 (Busquets 9, Keita 90+2) Att: 45,000

Real Sociedad 1 (Griezmann 63)
Valencia 0 Att: 32,076

Sunday, May 13

Espanyol 1 (Coutinho 77)
Sevilla 1 (Negredo 45+2) Att: 10,000

Getafe 0
Zaragoza 2 (Apono pen 58, Helder Postiga 90+1) Att: 12,000

Levante 3 (Ghezzal 45, 67, Farinos pen 88)
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 23,142

Malaga 1 (Rondon 49)
Sporting Gijon 0 Att: 27,000

Racing Santander 2 (Stuani 2, Jairo 81)
Osasuna 4 (Balde 54, Cejudo 67, Raul Garcia 71, Roversio 90) Att: 8,000

Rayo Vallecano 1 (Tamudo 90)
Granada 0 Att: 11,600

Real Madrid 4 (Cristiano Ronaldo 19, Benzema 23, Ozil 48, 58)
Mallorca 1 (Castro 52) Att: 83,000

Villarreal 0
Atletico Madrid 1 (Falcao 88) Att: 23,000

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last five minutes. San Jose, who needed just one point from their last two games to win the title, had lost to Oriente three days earlier.

BRAZIL

Neymar tops charts

Neymar's two goals in Santos' 8-0 victory over Bolivar in the Libertadores took him to a career total of 106 goals for the club, making him the team's top scorer in the post-Pele era.

He scored another two in the second leg of the Sao Paulo championship Final against Guarani as Santos won 7-2 on aggregate to win their third consecutive Paulista title – the first treble since Pele led the club to a trio of titles between 1967 and 1969.

Fluminense won their first Rio state title since 2005 as they beat Botafogo 5-1 on aggregate. Atletico-MG, Avia, Bahia, Coritiba and Santa Cruz were among the others to win state titles.

Goal machine...Neymar

URUGUAY

Final repeat

Defensor beat El Tanque Sisley 3-0 with goals from Federico Pintos, Nicolas Olivera and Diego Ferreira to clinch the clausura title. They will now meet apertura winners Nacional in a repeat of last year's championship play-off.

VENEZUELA

Libertadores booked

Deportivo Lara sealed the clausura with a 1-0 win over Mineros and ensured their place in next year's Libertadores Cup.

SPAIN – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid (C)	38	32	4	2	121	32	100
Barcelona	38	28	7	3	114	29	91
Valencia	38	17	10	11	59	44	61
Malaga	38	17	7	14	54	53	58
Atletico	38	15	11	12	53	46	56
Levante	38	16	7	15	54	50	55
Osasuna	38	13	15	10	44	61	54
Mallorca	38	14	10	14	42	46	52
Sevilla	38	13	11	14	48	47	50
Athletic	38	12	13	13	49	52	49
Getafe	38	12	11	15	40	51	47
Sociedad	38	12	11	15	46	52	47
Betis	38	13	8	17	47	56	47
Espanyol	38	12	10	16	46	56	46
Rayo	38	13	4	21	53	73	43
Zaragoza	38	12	7	19	36	61	43
Granada	38	12	6	20	35	56	42
Villarreal (R)	38	9	14	15	39	53	41
Gijon (R)	38	10	7	21	42	69	37
Racing (R)	38	4	15	19	28	63	27

Top scorers

50 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
46 Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
24 Radamel Falcao (Atletico Madrid)
22 Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)

SPANISH CUP

Final

May 25 - Madrid (Vicente Calderon)
Athletic Bilbao 0
Barcelona 3 (Pedro 3, 25, Messi 20)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 54,850. **Ref:** Fernandez Borbalan

SWEDEN

Apr 26: Elfsborg 2 GAIS 1; Gefle 0 AIK 1.
Apr 27: Helsingborg 1 Mjallby 1.
Apr 28: Syrianska 1 Hacken 2; IFK Gothenburg 2 Atvidaberg 1.
Apr 29: Djurgarden 1 Kalmar 1; Sundsvall 3 Orebro 1; Norrkoping 3 Malmo 2.
May 2: IFK Gothenburg 2 Sundsvall 0; Syrianska 1 Elfsborg 4; Atvidaberg 0 Hacken 3; Helsingborg 0 AIK 0.
May 3: Djurgarden 2 Orebro 1; Gefle 0 Norrkoping 2; Mjallby 2 Malmo 2.
May 4: Kalmar 2 GAIS 2.
May 5: Sundsvall 0 Helsingborg 1.
May 6: Norrkoping 1 Syrianska 4; Malmo 2 Atvidaberg 1.
May 7: Elfsborg 1 IFK Gothenburg 0; GAIS 2 Mjallby 2; Orebro 0 Kalmar 1.
May 8: AIK 1 Djurgarden 1.
May 10: Hacken 3 Gefle 0; Malmo 3 Helsingborg 0.
May 11: Syrianska 2 GAIS 0.
May 12: Djurgarden 1 Atvidaberg 1; Kalmar 1 Mjallby 2.
May 13: Norrkoping 3 Orebro 0; Elfsborg 1 AIK 0; Helsingborg 3 Hacken 2.
May 14: Gefle 0 Sundsvall 0; IFK G'burg 2 Malmo 2.
May 16: Hacken 6 Norrkoping 0; Atvidaberg 1 Syrianska 0; Kalmar 1 Helsingborg 1; Orebro 2 AIK 2.
May 17: GAIS 1 Sundsvall 2; Mjallby 1 IFK Gothenburg 1; Malmo 1 Elfsborg 0; Djurgarden 1 Gefle 1.
May 20: Hacken 1 Djurgarden 1; Atvidaberg 3 Kalmar 0; Orebro 0 Syrianska 1; Mjallby 0 Gefle 0; AIK 5 Norrkoping 2.
May 21: Sundsvall 0 Elfsborg 3; GAIS 1 IFK Gothenburg 1.
May 23: Gefle 2 Orebro 1; Norrkoping 2 Atvidaberg 2; Syrianska 2 Mjallby 1; Helsingborg 1 Djurgarden 1.
May 24: Sundsvall 1 Malmo 1; AIK 1 GAIS 0; Elfsborg 2 Hacken 0; IFK Gothenburg 1 Kalmar 1.

SWEDEN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Elfsborg	12	10	0	2	22	7	30
Malmo	12	6	4	2	20	16	22
AIK	12	5	6	1	15	9	21
Hacken	12	6	2	4	28	14	20
Helsingborg	12	4	6	2	12	12	18
Atvidaberg	12	5	2	5	22	19	17
Norrkoping	12	5	2	5	18	26	17
Mjallby	12	3	7	2	17	16	16
Syrianska	12	5	1	6	14	18	16
IFK Goth'burg	12	3	6	3	16	15	15
Djurgarden	12	2	7	3	15	16	13
Sundsvall	12	3	4	5	13	14	13
Kalmar	12	3	4	5	12	16	13
Gefle	12	2	5	5	7	17	11
GAIS	12	1	6	5	11	15	9
Orebro	12	0	4	8	10	22	4

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

SWITZERLAND

Apr 28: Grasshopper 2 Lucerne 2; Servette 2 Young Boys 1.
Apr 29: Thun 1 Sion 1; Basle 3 Lausanne 1.
May 1: Young Boys 1 Zurich 0.
May 2: Basle 2 Thun 1; Grasshopper 0 Servette 3; Lausanne 1 Sion 0.
May 5: Young Boys 2 Lucerne 2.
May 6: Sion 3 Grasshopper 2; Zurich 1 Basle 5; Servette 0 Lausanne 0.
May 12: Basle 6 Grasshopper 3; Lucerne 3 Lausanne 2.
May 13: Thun 2 Young Boys 2; Zurich 0 Servette 1.
May 20: Grasshopper 0 Zurich 1; Lucerne 0 Thun 1; Servette 2 Basle 1; Young Boys 3 Sion 0.
May 23: Basle 1 Young Boys 2; Lausanne 2 Grasshopper 1; Sion 1 Lucerne 3; Thun 2 Zurich 4.

SWITZERLAND – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Basle (C)	34	22	8	4	78	33	74
Lucerne	34	14	12	8	46	32	54
Young Boys	34	13	12	9	52	38	51
Servette	34	14	6	14	45	53	48
Thun	34	11	10	13	38	41	43
Zurich	34	11	8	15	43	44	41
Lausanne	34	8	6	20	29	61	30
Grasshopper	34	7	5	22	32	66	26
Sion[1,2]	34	15	8	11	40	35	17
Xamax[3] (R)	18	7	5	6	22	22	26

[1]36pts deducted for fielding ineligible players in 12 league games
[2]Sion entered rel/prom play-off
[3]Xamax had licence revoked during winter break after failing to submit the required financial documents. Their results up to the winter break (18 rounds) stood; remaining matches cancelled. Placed bottom of the table and demoted

TURKEY

After 34-round regular season, top 4 formed championship group, 5th to 8th formed Europa League-place group and bottom 3 (Samsunspor, Manisaspor and Ankaragucu) were relegated

Championship group

Apr 28: Trabzonspor 2 Galatasaray 4.
Apr 29: Fenerbahce 2 Besiktas 1.
May 2: Galatasaray 0 Trabzonspor 0.
May 3: Besiktas 1 Fenerbahce 0.
May 6: Trabzonspor 1 Fenerbahce 3; Galatasaray 2 Besiktas 2.
May 11: Besiktas 1 Trabzonspor 1.
May 12: Fenerbahce 0 Galatasaray 0.

TURKEY – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP[1] – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Galatasaray (C)	6	2	3	1	9	6	48
Fenerbahce	6	4	1	1	9	4	47
Trabzonspor	6	1	2	3	5	10	33
Besiktas	6	1	2	3	5	8	33

[1]Teams carried forward half the points (rounded up) gained during regular season

Europa League-place group

Bursaspor topped the group to take the Europa League place available through this route

UKRAINE

Apr 24: Tavriya 1 Metalurh 1.
May 2: Arsenal 3 Volyn 0; Metalurh 0 Dnipro 3; Tavriya 0 Vorskla 2; Metalist 1 Shakhtar 2; Obolon 0 Illichivets 0; Oleksandria 1 Chornomorets 3; Zorya 0 Dynamo 0; Karpaty 2 Kryvbas 0.
May 10: Vorskla 2 Metalist 2; Volyn 2 Zorya 2; Dnipro 2 Karpaty 0; Dynamo 1 Tavriya 1; Shakhtar 3 Oleksandria 0; Chornomorets 1 Obolon 0; Kryvbas 0 Arsenal 2; Illichivets 2 Metalurh 1.

UKRAINE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar (C)	30	25	4	1	80	18	79
Dynamo	30	23	6	1	56	12	75
Metalist	30	16	11	3	54	32	59
Dnipro	30	15	7	8	52	35	52
Arsenal	30	14	9	7	44	27	51
Tavriya	30	12	9	9	43	36	45
Metalurh	30	12	6	12	35	34	42
Vorskla	30	9	10	11	38	43	37
Chornomorets	30	10	7	13	32	42	37
Kryvbas	30	9	6	15	22	38	33
Illichivets	30	8	8	14	28	42	32
Volyn	30	7	6	17	25	43	27
Zorya	30	6	8	16	34	58	26
Karpaty	30	5	8	17	27	51	23
Obolon (R)	30	4	9	17	17	42	21
Oleksandria (R)	30	4	8	18	24	58	20

WALES

Division split after 22-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

WALES – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
New Saints (C)	32	23	5	4	75	31	74
Bangor	32	22	3	7	72	45	69
Neath (R)[1]	32	18	8	6	60	36	62
Llanelli	32	18	5	9	63	37	59
Bala	32	14	7	11	48	41	49
Prestatyn	32	8	4	20	41	63	28

WALES – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Airbus UK	32	10	9	13	48	50	39
Aberystwyth[2]	32	8	10	14	45	50	33
Port Talbot	32	8	9	15	39	51	33
Afan Lido	32	7	11	14	40	55	32
Carmarthen[1]	32	10	2	20	33	67	32
Newtown[1,3]	32	7	5	20	44	82	23

[1]Neath relegated after being refused licence; Carmarthen thus reprieved from relegation. Newtown were also reprieved from relegation as no club in the promotion places held the necessary licence
[2]1pt deducted for fielding ineligible player
[3]3pts deducted for fielding ineligible players

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

1st knockout round

1st legs

Apr 25
Bolivar (Bol) 2 (Rafael og 2, Campos 75)
Santos (Bra) 1 (Maranhao 35)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)

Apr 25
Internacional (Bra) 0
Fluminense (Bra) 0
Ref: De Oliveira (Bra)

May 1
Atletico Nacional (Col) 0
Velez Sarsfield (Arg) 1 (Bella 9)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ubriaco (Uru)

May 1
Cruz Azul (Mex) 1 (Orozco 27)
Libertad (Par) 1 (Velazquez 71)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pezzotta (Arg)

May 2
Boca Juniors (Arg) 2 (Riquelme 25, Silva 90)
Union Espanola (Chl) 1 (Jaime 73)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)
Sent off: Scotti (Espanola) 90+3min

May 2
Emelec (Ecu) 0
Corinthians (Bra) 0
Ref: Buitrago (Col)
Sent off: Jorge Henrique (Corinthians) 53min

May 2
Vasco da Gama (Bra) 2 (Alecsandro 26, Diego Souza 43)
Lanus (Arg) 1 (Regueiro 63)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)

May 3
Deportivo Quito (Ecu) 4 (Alustiza 30, 57, Checa 45, Martinez 83)
Universidad de Chile (Chl) 1 (Rodriguez 37)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Chacon (Mex)
Sent off: Olivo (Dep Quito) 31min; Gonzalez (Universidad) 60min

2nd legs

May 8
Libertad 2 (Nunez 10, Caceres 51)
Cruz Azul 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vuaden (Bra)
Libertad 3-1 on agg

May 8
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Fernandez 53)
Atletico Nacional 1 (Mosquera 70)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Quintana (Par)
Velez 2-1 on agg

May 9
Corinthians 3 (Fabio Santos 8, Paulinho 66, Alex 86)
Emelec 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ubriaco (Uru)
Corinthians 3-0 on agg

May 9
Lanus 2 (Pavone 61, Gutierrez 78)
Vasco da Gama 1 (Nilton 19)
No extra-time. **HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Amarilla (Par)
Agg 3-3; Vasco 5-4 on pens

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ALGERIA

League and cup win

ES Setif completed a domestic double, finishing three points clear of JSM Bejaia in the league and beating CR Belouizdad 2-1 in the Algerian Cup Final.

GHANA

Big winning margin

Asante Kotoko won the league title with four matches to spare after drawing 0-0 at home to Berekum Arsenal. They finished 14 points clear of runners-up Ashanti Gold, with Hearts of Oak third.

MOROCCO

Maiden championship

Moghreb Tetouan beat closest rivals FUS Rabat 1-0 with a goal from Abdelkarim Benhania on the final day of the season to clinch a first-ever championship. Defending champions Raja Casablanca finished fourth.

Winning double...McCarthy

SOUTH AFRICA

McCarthy on target

Veteran striker Benni McCarthy scored two second-half goals as Orlando Pirates came from behind to beat Golden Arrows 4-2 and retain their Premiership title.

SuperSport United beat 10-man Mamelodi Sundowns 2-0 in the South African FA Cup Final. Sundowns centre-back Clayton Daniels was sent off after 19 minutes, after which Thabo September and Kermit Erasmus were on target. SuperSport will now enter next year's Confederations Cup.

CLUB FOOTBALL

May 9
Union Espanola 2 (Pineda 62, Jaime 71)
Boca Juniors 3 (Insaurralde 26, Mouche 50, Riquelme 68)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Boca 5-3 on agg

May 10
Fluminense 2 (Leandro Euzebio 16, Fred 45+1)
Internacional 1 (Leandro Damiao 14)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Seneme (Bra)
Fluminense 2-1 on agg

May 10
Santos 8 (Elano 6, 51, Neymar pen 22, Ganso 28, 53, Alan Kardec 30, Valverde og 37, Borges 61)
Bolivar 0
HT: 5-0. **Ref:** Vazquez (Uru)
Santos 9-2 on agg

May 10
Universidad de Chile 6 (Fernandes 21, 28, Diaz 36, Mena 57, Henriquez 71, 74)
Deportivo Quito 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)
Universidad 7-4 on agg

Quarter-finals

1st legs

May 16
Libertad 1 (Caceres 8)
Universidad de Chile 1 (Lorenzetti 56)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ubriaco (Uru)
Sent off: Hernandez (Universidad) 90min

May 16
Vasco da Gama 0
Corinthians 0
Ref: Ricci (Bra)

May 17
Boca Juniors 1 (Mouche 52)
Fluminense 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Buitrago (Col)
Sent off: Carlinhos (Fluminense) 34min

May 17
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Obolo 36)
Santos 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Amarilla (Par)

2nd legs

May 23
Corinthians 1 (Paulinho 88)
Vasco da Gama 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vuaden (Bra)
Corinthians 1-0 on agg

May 23
Fluminense 1 (Thiago Carleto 17)
Boca Juniors 1 (Silva 90+1)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)
Boca 2-1 on agg

May 24
Santos 1 (Alan Kardec 78)
Velez Sarsfield 0
No extra-time. **HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)
Agg 1-1; Santos 4-2 on pens
Sent off: Barovero (Velez) 40min

May 24
Universidad de Chile 1 (Diaz 18)
Libertad 1 (Gonzalez og 23)
No extra-time. **HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Agg 2-2; Universidad 5-3 on pens

ARGENTINA

Clausura

Apr 27: Lanus 3 Racing 1; Estudiantes 0 Velez 2.
Apr 28: San Martin 1 Godoy Cruz 0; Newell's 1 All Boys 1; Independiente 2 Banfield 0; Boca 1 Colon 0.
Apr 29: Union 2 Olimpo 0; San Lorenzo 2 Arsenal 0; Argentinos 0 Rafaela 0.
Apr 30: Belgrano 1 Tigre 1.
May 4: Banfield 1 San Martin 2.
May 5: Velez 0 Argentinos 2; Tigre 4 Union 0; Arsenal 3 Independiente 1.
May 6: Godoy Cruz 0 Lanus 1; All Boys 0 San Lorenzo 0; Racing 2 Estudiantes 0; Olimpo 1 Newell's 2; Rafaela 2 Boca 2.
May 7: Colon 2 Belgrano 0.
May 11: Estudiantes 1 Godoy Cruz 0; San Martin 1 Arsenal 4.
May 12: Newell's 3 Union 1; Independiente 0 All Boys 3; S Lorenzo 1 Olimpo 1; Belgrano 1 Rafaela 1.
May 13: Lanus 2 Banfield 1; Argentinos 2 Racing 1; Colon 1 Tigre 1; Boca 0 Velez 0.
May 18: Godoy Cruz 1 Argentinos 1; Tigre 3 Newell's 1.
May 19: Banfield 0 Estudiantes 3; Union 1 San Lorenzo 0; All Boys 1 San Martin 0.
May 20: Olimpo 2 Independiente 1; Velez 0 Belgrano 1; Rafaela 0 Colon 0; Racing 0 Boca 2.
May 21: Arsenal 3 Lanus 1.
May 25: San Martin 3 Olimpo 2.
May 26: Argentinos 1 Banfield 0; Lanus 1 All Boys 0; Belgrano 0 Racing 1.
May 27: Rafaela 1 Tigre 1; San Lorenzo 3 Newell's 2; Independiente 0 Union 0; Boca 3 Godoy Cruz 0.
May 28: Estudiantes 1 Arsenal 1; Colon 0 Velez 2.

ARGENTINA – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca	16	9	5	2	28	13	32
Tigre	16	8	5	3	23	12	29
Arsenal	16	8	5	3	23	14	29
Newell's	16	8	4	4	23	16	28
Velez	16	7	6	3	22	12	27
All Boys	16	7	6	3	15	10	27
Argentinos	16	6	5	5	15	12	23
Lanus	16	7	2	7	17	16	23
Estudiantes	16	6	5	5	19	19	23
Union	16	5	7	4	19	18	22
Colon	16	5	7	4	18	17	22
San Lorenzo	16	5	6	5	18	19	21
Belgrano	16	5	6	5	13	16	21
Rafaela	16	4	6	6	18	19	18
Independiente	16	5	3	8	19	24	18
Racing	16	5	3	8	15	20	18
San Martin	16	5	3	8	18	25	18
Godoy Cruz	16	1	8	7	8	19	11
Olimpo	16	3	2	11	18	31	11
Banfield	16	2	4	10	13	30	10

19-round tournament (19x1); the 2 teams with the lowest average points tallies over the 3 most recent seasons will be relegated, the teams with 3rd & 4th lowest average tallies will enter rel/prom play-offs

BRAZIL

May 19: Palmeiras 1 Portuguesa 1; Figueirense 2 Nautico 1; Sport 1 Flamengo 1.
May 20: Botafogo 4 Sao Paulo 2; Corinthians 0 Fluminense 1; Internacional 2 Coritiba 0; Ponte Preta 0 Mineiro 1; Vasco 2 Gremio 1; Cruzeiro 0 Goianiense 0; Bahia 0 Santos 0.
May 26: Flamengo 3 Internacional 3; Portuguesa 0 Vasco 1; Goianiense 1 Ponte Preta 1; Nautico 0 Cruzeiro 0.
May 27: Santos 0 Sport 0; Sao Paulo 1 Bahia 0; Mineiro 1 Corinthians 0; Coritiba 2 Botafogo 3; Fluminense 2 Figueirense 2; Gremio 1 Palmeiras 0.

BRAZIL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Botafogo	2	2	0	0	7	4	6
Vasco	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Mineiro	2	2	0	0	2	0	6
Internacional	2	1	1	0	5	3	4
Figueirense	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Fluminense	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Gremio	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Sao Paulo	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Flamengo	2	0	2	0	4	4	2
Goianiense	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Sport	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Cruzeiro	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Santos	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Palmeiras	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Nautico	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Ponte Preta	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Portuguesa	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Bahia	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Corinthians	2	0	0	2	0	2	0
Coritiba	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

38-round season (19x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

CONCACAF

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Final

2nd leg

Apr 25
Santos Laguna (Mex) 2 (Luduena 45+3, Peralta 51)
Monterrey (Mex) 1 (Cardozo 82)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 28,000. **Ref:** Garcia (Mex)
Monterrey 3-2 on agg
Santos: Sanchez - Galindo, Estrada, Figueroa, Ibanez, Salinas (Ramirez 84), Luduena (Gomez 57), Rodriguez, Peralta, Quintero, Suarez (Morales 73).
Monterrey: Orozco - Basanta, Meza, Chavez, Mier, L Perez, Zavala, Reyna (Ayovi 65), Cardozo, Delgado (Carreno 84), De Nigris (Morales 87).

MEXICO

Clausura

Regular season

Apr 27: Tecos 1 Queretaro 1
Apr 28: Pachuca 3 Guadalajara 1; Tigres 1 Puebla 2; Atlas 1 Santos 3; Atlante 0 Monterrey 3; Jaguares 1 Morelia 0.
Apr 29: Toluca 2 San Luis 1; Tijuana 1 Pumas 1; America 2 Cruz Azul 2.

MEXICO – CLAUSURA: REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos (Q)	17	11	3	3	33	18	36
Monterrey (Q)	17	9	5	3	32	15	32
America (Q)	17	9	5	3	30	18	32
Morelia (Q)	17	9	4	4	25	18	31
Tigres (Q)	17	9	4	4	22	16	31
Pachuca (Q)	17	7	7	3	24	17	28
Tijuana (Q)	17	7	7	3	18	11	28
Jaguares (Q)	17	8	3	6	26	20	27
Cruz Azul	17	6	7	4	29	21	25
Toluca	17	6	4	7	24	27	22
Atlas	17	4	8	5	7	13	20
Puebla	17	5	4	8	19	23	19
Pumas	17	3	7	7	13	18	16
Atlante	17	4	4	9	20	31	16
Guadalajara	17	4	3	10	12	21	15
San Luis	17	3	3	11	15	30	12
Queretaro	17	2	6	9	14	30	12
Tecos (R)[1]	17	2	6	9	12	28	12

Top 8 entered clausura championship play-offs
[1]Tecos relegated as the team with the lowest average points tally over the 3 most recent seasons

Clausura play-offs

Quarter-finals

1st legs - May 2/3; 2nd legs - May 5/6
Jaguares v Santos 3-4, 1-2 (agg 4-6)
Pachuca v America 1-3, 1-0 (agg 2-3)
Tigres v Morelia 1-0, 4-1 (agg 5-1)
Tijuana v Monterrey 1-2, 2-2 (agg 3-4)

Semi-finals

1st legs - May 9/10; 2nd legs - May 12/13
America v Monterrey 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Tigres v Santos 1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3, Santos went through on better regular season record)

Final, 1st leg

May 17
Monterrey 1 (Suazo pen 90+4)
Santos 1 (Peralta 70)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Morales

Final, 2nd leg

May 20
Santos 2 (Luduena 6, Peralta 65)
Monterrey 1 (De Nigris 79)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Garcia
Santos 3-2 on agg

UNITED STATES

Regular season

Apr 25: Dallas 1 Salt Lake 1.
Apr 28: Montreal 2 Portland 0; New York 1 New England 0; Philadelphia 1 San Jose 2; Columbus 0 Vancouver 1; DC United 3 Houston 2; Chicago 1 Seattle 2; Colorado 4 Chivas 0; Salt Lake 3 Toronto 2; Los Angeles 1 Dallas 1.
May 2: New England 2 Colorado 1; Seattle 2 Los Angeles 0; San Jose 5 DC United 3.
May 4: Chivas 1 Chicago 2.
May 5: Toronto 0 DC United 2; Seattle 1 Philadelphia 0; Vancouver 2 San Jose 1; Los Angeles 0 New York 1; Kansas City 0 Montreal 2; Salt Lake 2 New England 1; Portland 0 Columbus 0.
May 6: Dallas 0 Colorado 2.
May 9: New York 1 Houston 0; Dallas 0 Seattle 2; Chicago 0 Salt Lake 0.
May 12: Montreal 1 Los Angeles 1; Houston 1 DC United 0; New England 4 Vancouver 1; Columbus 2 Dallas 1; Chicago 2 Kansas City 1; Seattle 0 Salt Lake 1.
May 13: Philadelphia 2 New York 3; San Jose 1 Chivas 1.
May 15: Houston 0 Portland 0.
May 16: DC United 2 Colorado 0.
May 19: Vancouver 2 Seattle 2; Montreal 1 New York 2; DC United 3 Toronto 1; New England 2 Houston 2; Dallas 1 Philadelphia 1; Colorado 2 Kansas City 2; Chivas 1 Los Angeles 0; San Jose 1 Columbus 1.
May 20: Portland 2 Chicago 1.
May 23: New York 1 Chivas 1; Chicago 2 Dallas 1; Seattle 0 Columbus 2; Los Angeles 2 San Jose 3.
May 26: Houston 2 Los Angeles 1; Toronto 1 Philadelphia 0; Columbus 2 Chicago 1; DC United 3 New England 2; Salt Lake 3 Dallas 2; Colorado 3 Montreal 2; Portland 1 Vancouver 1; Chivas 1 Seattle 1.
May 27: Kansas City 2 San Jose 1.

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AUSTRALIA

United go through

Adelaide United, who came through the qualifying play-off round, became the first Australian club to progress from the group stage of the AFC Champions League, clinching their place in the last 16 with a goalless draw at home to Bunyodkor of Uzbekistan.

SAUDI ARABIA

Equalling the record

Al Shabab, under the guidance of Belgian coach Michel Preud'homme, won the Pro League title with 64 points, equalling the record set by Al Hilal last season.

Runners-up Al Ahli retained their Saudi Arabian Champions Cup title with a 4-1 victory over Al Nasr in the Final.

Record breaker...Oliveira

UAE

Brazilian's new best

Despite his Al Jazira side going out of the AFC Champions League to Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli, Brazilian striker Ricardo Oliveira scored twice to take his record-breaking tally for this season's competition to 12.

Al Ain won the league, finishing 14 points clear of runners-up Al Nasr.

USA – REGULAR: EASTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
DC United	15	8	3	4	28	19	27
New York	13	8	2	3	26	18	26
Kansas City	12	8	1	3	17	10	25
Chicago	12	5	3	4	15	15	18
Columbus	12	5	3	4	13	13	18
Houston	11	4	4	3	12	12	16
New England	12	4	1	7	16	18	13
Montreal	13	3	3	7	15	21	12
Philadelphia	11	2	2	7	8	14	8
Toronto	10	1	0	9	8	21	3

34-round regular season (7x3 & 2x2 in own conference, 9x1 in western conference)

USA – REGULAR: WESTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salt Lake	14	9	2	3	22	14	29
San Jose	14	8	3	3	27	17	27
Seattle	13	7	3	3	16	9	24
Colorado	13	6	1	6	20	18	19
Vancouver	12	5	4	3	13	14	19
Chivas	13	4	3	6	9	14	15
Portland	12	3	4	5	12	15	13
Dallas	15	3	4	8	15	24	13
Los Angeles	13	3	2	8	15	21	11

34-round regular season (8x3 in own conference, 10x1 in eastern conference)

Top 5 in both conferences will enter championship play-offs; no relegation from this league

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

2nd round

1st legs - Apr 28/29; 2nd legs - May 12-14

Al Hilal (Sud) v ASO Chlef (Alg) 1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2, ASO Chlef 4-2 on pens); Berekum Chelsea (Gha) v Coton Sport (Cam) 0-0, 2-1 (agg 2-1); Djoliba (Mli) v Sunshine Stars (Nga) 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2); Esperance (Tun) v Dynamos (Zim) 6-0, 1-1 (agg 7-1); Etoile Sahel (Tun) v Amadou Diallo (IvC) 4-1, 0-1 (agg 4-2); Maghreb Fes (Mor) v Zamalek (Egy) 0-2, 0-2 (agg 0-4); Stade Malien (Mli) v Al Ahly (Egy) 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3); TP Mazembe (DRC) v Al Merreikh (Sud) 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

May 2: Al Jazira (UAE) 4 Nasaf (Uzb) 1; Esteghlal (Irn) 3 Al Rayyan (Qat) 0.
May 16: Al Rayyan 3 Al Jazira 4; Nasaf 0 Esteghlal 2.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Jazira (Q)	6	5	1	0	18	10	16
Esteghlal (Q)	6	3	2	1	8	3	11
Al Rayyan	6	2	0	4	9	12	6
Nasaf	6	0	1	5	4	14	1

Group B

May 2: Al Arabi (Qat) 0 Bani Yas (UAE) 4; Pakhtakor (Uzb) 1 Al Ittihad (Sau) 2.
May 16: Al Ittihad 3 Al Arabi 2; Bani Yas 2 Pakhtakor 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ittihad (Q)	6	5	1	0	13	4	16
Bani Yas (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	2	11
Pakhtakor	6	2	1	3	6	10	7
Al Arabi	6	0	0	6	4	16	0

Group C

May 1: Al Ahli (Sau) 3 Lekhwiya (Qat) 0; Al Nasr (UAE) 0 Sepahan (Irn) 3.
May 15: Lekhwiya 1 Al Nasr 2; Sepahan 2 Al Ahli 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sepahan (Q)	6	4	1	1	9	4	13
Al Ahli (Q)	6	3	1	2	10	6	10
Al Nasr	6	2	0	4	6	11	6
Lekhwiya	6	2	0	4	5	9	6

Group D

May 1: Al Gharafa (Qat) 2 Al Shabab (UAE) 1; Persepolis (Irn) 0 Al Hilal (Sau) 1.
May 15: Al Hilal 2 Al Gharafa 1; Al Shabab 1 Persepolis 3.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal (Q)	6	3	3	0	10	7	12
Persepolis (Q)	6	3	2	1	14	5	11
Al Gharafa	6	1	3	2	7	10	6
Al Shabab	6	0	2	4	5	14	2

Group E

May 2: Adelaide United (Aus) 0 Bunyodkor (Uzb) 0; Pohang Steelers (SKo) 2 Gamba Osaka (Jap) 0.
May 16: Bunyodkor 1 Pohang Steelers 0; Gamba Osaka 0 Adelaide United 2.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Adelaide (Q)	6	4	1	1	7	2	13
Bunyodkor (Q)	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
Pohang	6	3	0	3	6	4	9
Gamba	6	1	0	5	5	13	3

Group F

May 2: Beijing Guoan (Chn) 2 Ulsan Hyundai (SKo) 3; Tokyo (Jap) 4 Brisbane Roar (Aus) 2.
May 16: Brisbane Roar 1 Beijing Guoan 1; Ulsan Hyundai 1 Tokyo 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ulsan (Q)	6	4	2	0	11	7	14
Tokyo (Q)	6	3	2	1	12	6	11
Brisbane	6	0	3	3	6	11	3
Beijing	6	0	3	3	6	11	3

Group G

May 1: Central Coast M'ers (Aus) 5 Tianjin Teda (Chn) 1; Seongnam IC (SKo) 1 Nagoya Grampus (Jap) 1.
May 15: Nagoya Grampus 3 Central Coast Mariners 0; Tianjin Teda 0 Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma 3.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Seongnam (Q)	6	2	4	0	13	5	10
Nagoya (Q)	6	2	4	0	10	4	10
Central Coast	6	1	3	2	7	11	6
Tianjin	6	0	3	3	2	12	3

Group H

May 1: Guangzhou E'de (Chn) 1 Jeonbuk Motors (SKo) 3; Kashiwa Reysol (Jap) 1 Buriram (Tha) 0.
May 15: Buriram United 1 Guangzhou Evergrande 2; Jeonbuk Motors 0 Kashiwa Reysol 2.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guangzhou (Q)	6	3	1	2	12	8	10
Kashiwa (Q)	6	3	1	2	11	7	10
Jeonbuk	6	3	0	3	10	15	9
Buriram	6	2	0	4	8	11	6

Top 2 in each group qualified for 1st knockout rnd

JAPAN

JAPAN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vegalta	13	8	3	2	27	12	27
Sanfrecce	13	8	1	4	26	15	25
Jubilo	13	7	3	3	30	17	24
Shimizu	13	7	2	4	15	11	23
Urawa	13	6	4	3	17	13	22
Tokyo	12	7	1	4	15	13	22
Kawasaki	13	7	1	5	21	21	22
Sagan	13	5	5	3	15	11	20
Yokohama	13	4	6	3	14	12	18
Kashima	13	5	2	6	20	17	17
Cerezo	13	5	2	6	16	15	17
Kashiwa	12	5	2	5	19	19	17
Nagoya	12	5	2	5	15	17	17
Vissel	13	5	0	8	17	22	15
Omiya	13	4	3	6	11	22	15
Gamba	12	2	3	7	15	25	9
Albirex	13	2	3	8	7	19	9
Consadole	13	1	1	11	9	28	4

Standings on May 29

34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

OCEANIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Final

1st leg

Apr 29

Auckland City (NZ) 2 (Mulligan 56, Koprivcic 60)
Tefana (Tah) 1 (Williams 70)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 1,500. **Ref:** Saohu (Sol)

2nd leg

May 12

Tefana 0
Auckland City 1 (Exposito 41)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 1,900. **Ref:** Assiene-Ambassa (NC)
Auckland 3-1 on agg
Sent off: Feneridis (Auckland) 69min

KEY TO TABLES

(C) = champions (R) = relegated (Q) = qualified

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

June 8 to 12
World Cup qualifiers
June 8 to July 1
European Championship
June 11
OFC Nations Cup Final
June 12, 13 or 14
Libertadores Cup semi-finals, first leg
June 15 to 19
African Nations Cup first round qualifiers, second leg
June 19, 20 or 21
Libertadores Cup semi-finals, second leg
June 24
Argentinian clausura ends
June 26, 27 or 28
Libertadores Cup Final, first leg

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THE GREAT TEAMS

France 2000

Stylish side who became the first team to win the European title as world champions

Champions...France celebrate their Euro 2000 triumph

France, who had won the World Cup two years earlier on home soil, crossed the border into Belgium and Holland and became the first team to win the European Championship as reigning world champions. West Germany had done it the other way round, winning the 1972 Euro and then the 1974 world title.

France did it in style at Euro 2000 with entertaining football and sparkling individual displays. The 1998 World Cup team was reinforced by Patrick Vieira in midfield, and had a potent strike force in Thierry Henry and the emerging David Trezeguet and Nicolas Anelka. Zinedine Zidane, at his peak, once again proved the key to success.

France cruised through their group, beating Denmark and Czech Republic so easily they could afford to field a second-string XI in their final game, a 3-2 defeat by Holland.

Spain proved a tougher nut in the quarter-finals, but Raul missed a last-minute penalty and goals from Zidane and Youri Djorkaeff saw France through. Portugal were seen off in the semi-final, despite violent protests at the award of a late extra-time penalty, converted by Zidane.

Italy took the lead in the Final and held on until the final minute when Sylvain Wiltord struck, setting up extra time and Trezeguet's "golden goal".

Confederations Cup success in South Korea a year later led to many installing France as 2002 World Cup favourites. But Zidane was injured and they suffered a shock group-stage exit. WS

THE MANAGER AND HIS TEAM

Roger Lemerre
Assistant to World Cup-winning boss Aime Jacquet, he took over as national coach in 1998. Oversaw victory at Euro 2000 and the 2001 Confederations Cup but sacked after a disastrous 2002 World Cup in Korea. Became the only coach to win the European Championship and African Nations Cup when he steered Tunisia to the African title in 2004, but failed with Morocco in 2008 and was most recently in charge of Turkish side Ankaragucu.

Promoted...Lemerre

Tactics
Under Lemerre, France continued with the 4-2-3-1 formation favoured by Jacquet in 1998. The difference in 2000 was that Henry gave them greater mobility in attack.

The back four remained the same as two years earlier, while Vieira was a more dynamic option in central midfield in place of Emmanuel Petit. Zidane was still the playmaker, with Djorkaeff, Dugarry and Wiltord providing attacking width.

Lemerre also had the luxury of extra attackers in Trezeguet and Anelka, giving the option to switch to 4-4-2.

THE FIRST XI

Fabien Barthez
Goalkeeper
Charismatic keeper famous for his short-sleeved shirts and athleticism.

Lilian Thuram
Right-back
Powerful athlete who made the right flank his own and won a record 142 caps.

Laurent Blanc
Centre-back
Overcame criticism of his age and pace at Euro 2000. Retired from *Les Bleus* after the Final.

Marcel Desailly
Centre-back
Ghana-born defender or defensive midfielder who won more than 100 caps.

Bixente Lizarazu
Left-back
Basque-born attacking defender who spent most of his club career at Bayern Munich

Patrick Vieira
Midfielder
Long-legged, dominant player adept at both ball-winning and creative distribution.

Didier Deschamps
Midfielder
Captain and midfield anchor, famously dismissed by Eric Cantona as a "water carrier".

Youri Djorkaeff
Midfielder
Attacking star whose father, Jean, also played for France.

Zinedine Zidane
Midfielder
Playmaker of Algerian descent whose influence was colossal for more than a decade.

Christophe Dugarry
Forward
Deployed in a variety of attacking roles. Played for Milan, Barcelona and Birmingham City.

Thierry Henry
Forward
The main attacking threat. Former winger who was converted into a central striker at Arsenal.

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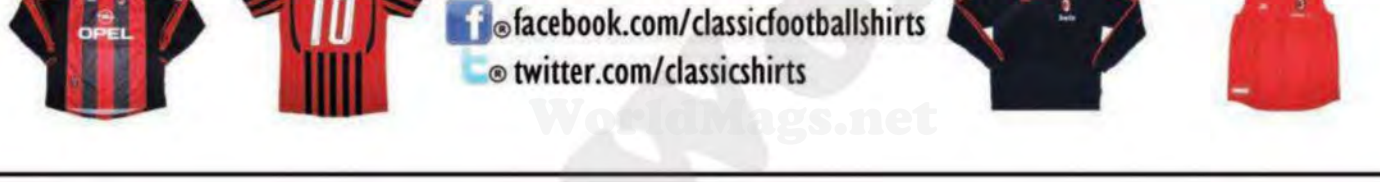

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